



HERE AND THERE IN ITALY



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AND

OVER THE BORDER

BY

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*Author of Tuscany Hill and Lincian Waters When I was
a Child etc*

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AUTHOR'S FOREWORD.



IT may be well to explain to my readers that although in two chapters, Val Bregaglia and San Martino di Castrozza, I cross the frontiers of Italy, these border regions possess so many Italian characteristics, that little licence is needed to justify their inclusion under the title of "Here and There in Italy."

Part of the volume consists of entirely new matter, but I beg to tender my hearty thanks to the editors of "The National Review," "Macmillan's Magazine," "The English Illustrated Magazine," "Murray's Magazine," "The Leisure Hour," and "Belgravia," for their courteous permission to reprint papers formerly published in their pages.

LINDA VILLARI.

CONTENTS



CHAPTER I	PAGE
AT THE LIRE OF ITALY	1
CHAPTER II	
BORDIGHERA AND ITS ASSOCIATIONS	34
CHAPTER III	
VAI BREGAGLIA	58
CHAPTER IV	
ASOLO AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD	99
CHAPTER V	
SAN MARINO	119
CHAPTER VI	
CAPRI	136

<i>CONTENTS.</i>	vii
CHAPTER VII	PAGE
SAN MARTINO DI CASTROZZA	172
CHAPTER VIII	
VAL D'AOSTA	191
CHAPTER IX	
COURMAYEUR	220
CHAPTER X	
IMPRESSIONS OF NEW ROME	243

HERE AND THERE IN ITALY.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE EDGE OF ITALY.

BOSCO CHIESANUOVA is a Veronese summer resort, 3,000 feet above the sea, and five hours' drive from Can Grande's city. The actual distance is about twenty miles ; but it is collar-work nearly the whole way. Once past the fortified hills outside Porta Ves-covo, the road mounts between the limestone walls of Val Pantena, through chestnut groves, and across fat uplands to the first spurs of the Alps. Pine-woods rise ahead parted by tortuous ravines ; bold ridges stretch forth into the plain.

One skirts great bluffs of limestone—younger brothers of the Tirolese Schlern—seamed by horizontal lines of caves, and the ground all about yawns with quarries of red Veronese stone. Hedges give place to loose stone walls, houses are roofed, gardens fenced by slabs of the same mottled pink stone, resembling monstrous slices of Castile soap.

Magnified Sussex downs spread in huge billows about us, sink into wooded hollows, and rise eastward to a lofty ridge capped by the cone of Purga di Velo. In spite of the Italian sky, Lombard plain and the grand bulwark of Garda's mountains climbing in slow curves to misty summits, downs, chalk-pits, and oak-copses give a familiar English aspect to the landscape. So on for miles, then the way is steeper, pines are taller and the bones of the world break through the turf in limestone reefs. There is a glimpse of grey peaks to the north above an amphitheatre of forest, houses gather near the gaunt, white barracks of the "Alpine regiment"; and here at last is Chiesanuova, the capital of the "Thirteen Communes" formerly

known as "I Monti del Carbon," or Charcoal Mountains.

It is an untidy townlet, with a fringe of raw new houses, loose stones, and timbers ; but it is enchantingly placed on a height commanding half Lombardy, clasped by rocks and woods, and backed by the Lessini range, which divides this corner of Italy from Austrian Tirol. To the west, beyond broken land scored by the limestone gullies peculiar to the district, long-flanked Monte Baldo rears its bulk ; and at the root of this noble mountain a stretch of Lake Garda is seen ; and the Peschiera forts, and the tip of Catullus's island home thrust forth like a tongue in the blue water. It is the Lombard plain that gives life and variety to the prospect. The glory of it, and the vastness, seem to widen one's mental horizon and sweep petty cares away. Ever-changing effects and colours play over its surface (on clear mornings even the far-distant Apennines are visible) ; the Adige and lesser streams, on their way to the sea, inscribe the great green level with a hundred silvery scrolls ;

and rice-fields and lagoons gleam like mirrors beyond.

On this plain of historic fights, these watery arabesques might be runcs recording the deeds of the dead on a grander scale than the memorial tower—that white speck away to the right—raised to the heroes of Solferino and San Martino.

Chiesanuova is a very primitive place, and nothing is done to advertise its charms to the outer world ; yet the peaks of the Tirolese "Cadrega," within a day's work, deserve your notice ; and the Lessini summits, Corno d'Acquilio and Monte Malera, are interesting and easy ascents. Italian landlords, however, are unspeculative, and Italian visitors unexact. Fearing increased prices, the visitors prefer the place as it is. Both fall back on the formula that in the mountains, *si sa*, one must rough it. Accordingly, year after year, Veronese families contentedly return to the same frowzy lodgings ; the two bad hotels are always crammed to over-flowing ; and the dingy fly-blown cafés in the Piazza drive a thriving trade. Still, new

houses are springing up on the waste ground behind. In one of them, Casa Luigia Tinazzi, good accommodation and cleanliness may be found. Western windows frame exquisite views of Lake Garda and its peaks ; front ones look to the ridge of Monte Tabor crowned by the groves and turrets of Count P——'s hospitable home, and forming a Giant's Causeway to the heights beyond. The Tinazzi house is reputed to be quiet ; but quietness is loosely understood at Chiesanuova. Instead of merely comprising an extravagant proportion of deaf-mutes, all its inhabitants might be deaf. To have blocks of stone quarried and grooved and blown up at one's front door, iron girders hammered close by, wood chopped and sawn behind, bowls played on the road a few yards off, all the small fry of the place romping in and out of empty carts on the green, tipsy peasants wrangling over games of "Morra" at the pot-house round the corner, together with frequent clanging of church bells—this scarce realizes hopes of silvan seclusion. It is a good day when only hammering and chiselling go on incessantly

from five o'clock in the morning to seven p.m. As extra treats, pig markets are held on the green. One of these greeted our arrival ; and even the amusement of watching the crowd and discovering that the elder peasants assembled mostly wore a Tirolese costume of knee-breeches, blue hose, red garters and feathered hats, could not close one's ears to the squeals of their ill-treated ware. And, what a *crescendo* when, the day's business done, unsold beasts scampering the wrong way, were roughly recaptured, driven by their poor tails, and hoisted by their ears into carts !

The big Piazza is, of course, the centre of Chiesanuovan life. It is an irregular oblong : with picturesque houses and shops on one side, and a great white church, massive red belfry, and scattered dwellings, overhanging woods and plain, on the other. A white marble Virgin stands on a column in the middle of the square, and here, at nightfall, peasants come to pray, the male and female voices intoning the " Rosary " in turn.

The church dates from the XIII. century. Its well-proportioned interior has pointed Gothic arches. Unluckily, it has been restored, and the time-worn stone pillars are painted to imitate Verona marble. Despite the tawdriness of its decorations, the interior is effective in festival array. Sunbeams filtered through stained glass, and festoons and draperies of red, blue, green, and yellow tarletan play pretty tricks of colour on the throng of white-veiled heads in the nave. The men are packed apart in choir and transept, for the old custom of dividing the sexes still obtains in Chicsanuova. High mass is always accompanied by brisk operatic airs, and the "Traviata" drinking song is thought appropriate to the elevation of the Host. When the preacher appears in the pulpit, the congregation compose themselves for the sermon by turning down the seats of their praying stools, during this clatter the orator has time to blow his nose, and his acolyte to settle comfortably on the pulpit stairs. From the enlightened parish-priest one is sure to hear kindly, well-delivered teachings suited

to the needs of his flock ; but sometimes a burly Capuchin, with dramatic gesticulation and rhetoric, takes his place, or a Jesuit missionary calls sinners to repentance by declaring that recent floods, earthquakes, and hailstorms, had been sent to punish them for taking God's name in vain.

Chiesanuova is pious, and the parish is large. During the five days devoted to the "Forty Hours" all the country-side poured into the town. On Sunday it joined in a monster procession, bearing three Madonnas and a dozen saints, that took more than a hour to wind its multi-coloured length round the Church to the cross at the edge of the woods and back again to the altar. Every afternoon these days one saw the women, with their veils and books wrapped in handkerchiefs, tramping away to their distant homes ; but most of the men remained behind to drink and gamble.

Although too fond of wine, the mountaineers are peaceful and courteous even in their cups. "Pardon, Signora : I'm drunk," said one of the tipplers as he

lurched against a lady on the road. Even street boys are polite, stopping their games to let you pass with friendly nods and smiles. The babies are a well-fed, rosy throng, born of comely mothers.

Save for the abundance of deaf and dumb, one might imagine that neither excess of merrymaking in summer, nor of huddling in close stables during the long winter, impaired the vigour of the race, derived, according to local tradition, from the ancient Cimbrians, and, undoubtedly, from some Teutonic stock. This ethnological problem shall be touched upon anon. Meanwhile it should be explained that Bosco Chiesanuova is a misnomer. Two hundred years ago, when these hills still supplied all Venice with fuel, the Bosco may have deserved its name; but, at the rate the timber is now vanishing, it will soon be as a Scotch deer forest. Pastures pay better than trees. Therefore, the land is split into small holdings, and the woods are scattered patches, seldom extending over more than a few acres. Two or three hillsides are still covered with fine beeches, and

a few splendid firs linger in the hollows ; but most of the trees are of less than moderate growth. One sees no giant aisles of pines, as in the Tuscan wilds of Camaldoli, Abetone, and Vallombrosa. Nevertheless, these Chiesanuovan woods are charming in their way. The glades are scored with limestone reefs like tiny Pompeian streets ; and the winding ravines, called Vaji, almost as deep as American cañons, give unexpectedness to the landscape. Flowers are plentiful, for the field and alpine floras meet here in equal luxuriance. Every cleft of moss-cushioned boulder is rosy with cyclamen ; campanulæ and mulleins rear blue and yellow spikes ; pirolas nestle on northern slopes ; gentians and eye-bright carpet the ground ; and giant gentians tower aloft in glorious azure plumes.

The worst fault of the district is its scarcity of water. No torrents course down these silent hills. The nearest spring—a mere trickle—is two miles off ; and the only considerable one gushes from the rocks of Scandole, nearly double that distance from

the town. Still, paradoxically, Chiesanuova does a brisk trade in ice. Rain-water is stored in innumerable ponds and reservoirs, flanked by wigwam-like ice-pits. One is always meeting carts full of great dripping slabs covered with layers of pine twigs.

Industry and thrift rule in this prosperous town-ship. There are no beggars, no tramps, and (seeing that all doors are left on the latch) apparently no thieves; and nearly all the land is owned by peasants. This is an ideal state of things; but one's admiration for it is rather marred by personal inconvenience. To keep out trespassing cattle, every wood and pasture is enclosed by stone walls, which although low and loose, oblige the rambler to continual gymnastics. Practice is needed to negotiate these barriers without bringing down tons of rock upon one's toes. Success soon gives zest to the effort: especially on finding that the cattle are not penned in here or there on account of their ferocity, but that the cows are as amiable as the people, and even the bulls inoffensive.

Besides strolls in dreamy glades among birds, squirrels, butterflies, and flowers, a good deal of stiff climbing may be done, up and down precipitous Vaji to lonely hill-towns. For military reasons, no carriage-roads are allowed to connect the frontier villages. Thus, although interesting Erbezzo and the sanctuary crag of Purga di Velo are within a few miles of Chiesanuova, it is impossible to reach them on wheels without first driving down more than half-way to Verona, and remounting by a circuitous route. Certainly, in case of war with Austria, an invading force would be more likely to attempt unguarded passes than to steam down Lake Garda or run the gauntlet of the Val d'Adige forts.

The vicinity of the frontier adds to Chiesanuova's charms. An exiled Trentino settled in Italy comes hither every summer to gaze at his native province and sigh for its freedom from Austrian rule. The boundary-stone on Monte Sparviero 6,000 feet above the sea, may be reached in an easy three-hours ride across the pastures of Podesteria ; and standing be-

side it, one looks over a precipice into the verdant depths of Tirolese Val de' Ronchi, at the foot of the Cadrega. To the left, past jagged headlands, lies a riband-like stretch of Val d'Adige, with river and rail apparently running uphill beyond Ala. From this lofty perch, at the edge of Tirol, we gazed one day into a world of dreams. Mists suddenly floated from below, half-veiled the lovely scene, and swung up in filmy trails over the opposite crags and fields. Not only does the sight of another land spur the imagination, but—"Irredentista" theories notwithstanding—there is a difference of physiognomy between Italy and Tirol. Even the solitary farmhouse nestling yonder among the firs at the foot of our mountain is quite distinct in its broad-eaved cosy trimness from the gaunt homesteads this side of the border. Patches of rhododendrons a hundred yards below enhanced the impression of northernness, and presently an agile Italian revenue-man came bounding up the steep with the alien alpenroses and edelweiss he had plucked for us.

The pastures of Podesteria are vast rolling downs ending in sudden precipices to the north, and sinking southwards by wooded ravines to the Lombard plain. Cattle innumerable are grazing on the treeless waste ; in every hollow are tiny ponds, and a few herdsmen's huts in the shape of miniature wigwams. The only buildings far and wide are one rude stone inn and a chapel, hardly to be distinguished from the group of grey rocks behind them.

On that blazing, cloudless day, there was no suggestion of bleakness in the landscape ; the turf was a flower-garden of golden arnica, torquoise forget-me-nots, grey campanulæ, and scented nigritella ; only tinkling cow-bells broke the stillness ; but one could imagine what a place of desolation it must be when swept by howling winds or deep in snow. The guard who had so lightly leapt into Tirol for a handful of flowers must have a dreary time in this exposed station. Once a year, however, there is a high festival at Podesteria. Mass is served in the little chapel ; there is dancing and merry-making ;

crowds of Tirolese flock over the border, and subjects of the Kaiser join hands with those of the King.

Another favourite excursion from Chiesanuova is to Cima di Malera, at the eastern end of the Lessini range. Again, taking horse at Tracchi, where the carriage-road ends, one mounts to the summit by a route more varied and steeper than the Podesteria path. Again one traverses vast downs with bluffs and boulders of limestone on all sides ; but these rock-girt pastures and intervalles command more striking scenery ; and, crossing the head of the Squaranto ravine, one notes with interest that even this deep and precipitous gorge starts, like other Vaji, from a shallow dint in the downs. These dry cañons are, indeed, the most curious feature of the Lessini region. The dairy farms scattered about are different from the picturesque woodland "Malghe" of South Tirol. These of the Lessini are rough stone shanties on treeless slopes, with internal arrangements of a primitive sort ; but their cream and curds are delicious, and send us on refreshed to the Croce di

Malera. This crag overhangs a deep narrow gully walled by wonderful cliffs, orange and grey, backed by sharp pinnacles, and zigzagged by a perilous tract to Recoaro. The frontier station lies far below on the bank of a small torrent that, after speeding to earthquaky Tregnago, is seen, increased to a respectable river, twisting across the plain to the Adige. Westwards, through a gap in the hills, the towered ridge of Monte Tabor is throned among the woods of Chiesanuova. The double cone of the Malera Alta rises steeply beside our lesser crag, and after luncheon we climb to the stone man on the summit, and gain a wider view of Tirol. The edge of Italy is wilder and more precipitous here than at Podesteria, and the Cadrega peaks show their finest profile at the turn of Val de' Ronchi. Beyond, in dream-like distance, rise range after range of peaks with seams of snow and ice. We had made the ascent along the crest of the ridge; but now, zigzagging down into an intervalle, we reached the "Busa," or Hole of Malera.

This surprising cavern must have been the *monsin*

of a prehistoric glacier. It resembles a huge artificial well. Its circle of limestone is nearly perfect, only interrupted at one section by a few intruding crags. Its diameter is at least one third greater than that of the famous XVI.-century Pozzo S. Patrizio at Orvieto, and its depth is unknown. The mass of snow and ice about a hundred feet down has never been probed to the bottom, for although much is continually extracted, the supply seems inexhaustible. A few yards off a smaller hole of irregular form leads to a cavern taining a tiny spring of water. This also must have been a *moulin*. Near it I found bits of stone scored with ice marks. No guide-book mentions those curious pits, and, as far as I know, no written account of them exists.

Despite the neglect of its natural beauties, the Lessini region is well known to ethnologists. Germans and Italians are engaged in hot controversy as to its original population. Like their neighbours of the Seven Communes in the Vicentine hills, the people of the Thirteen Communes claim descent

from a Cimbrian horde, said to have found refuge in the wilds when routed by Marius on the Paduan plain. The theory is held by many German and a few Italian *savants*. All quote the testimony of the Danish King Frederick IV., who, visiting these mountains and the Seven Communes in 1708, declared that the people spoke the language of Jutland, the home of the ancient Cimbri. According to Benedetto, an esteemed Tirolese authority, the supposed Cimbri were a Teuton tribe, summoned to Italy by Theodoric early in the VI. century.

Other Germans maintain that the people of both the Thirteen and the Seven Communes are merely Germanic "islands" derived from the Teutons of Tirol, and parted from the parent stock by the Italianization of the neighbouring districts in the XII. and XIII. centuries. Next comes Schneller's theory that all the Trentino, the Veronese highlands, Vicenza, and even Verona and Padua, once formed a compact Teutonic nation, and, consequently, that the inhabitants of all this region are of German descent. This

is contradicted by Italian ethnologists : especially by Professors Marinelli and Malfatti, who urge many arguments to show that, even in the old times, the province of Trent included a strong Italian element, and that the Lessini, instead of being merely colonized by German settlers, have been continuously inhabited from a very remote period. Indeed, the flint implements found in the Velo caves, a few miles from Chiesanuova, prove the existence of a population in the neolithic age. Near these caves, on the cone of Monte Purga, there was once a fortress of unknown origin, afterwards replaced by a mediæval stronghold, and now the site of a great sanctuary visible, on its lofty perch, even from Venice. Relics of Roman occupation abound in the eastern hills of the Lessini ; Tregnago and Selva di Progno contributing various inscriptions, San Vitale in Arco remains of fortifications ; while the Verona Museum has stores of weapons, ornaments, glass, pottery, and imperial coins, exhumed from a Roman villa in the same district.

The names of the Thirteen Communes are certainly of Latin derivation,* and so are those of the larger villages; but many hamlets bear German appellations, such as "Gries," "Gierz," and "Becherle." The term "Lessini" comes from "lexin," signifying pasture land.

Whether derived from Cimbrian warriors or from Tirolese nomads, this mountain race has a strong Gothic strain. Light eyes and hair abound, and most of the babies have lint-white polls. The people cling proudly to the Cimbrian tradition, and point, as evidence, to the hamlet of Cimberlini, in the hills behind Chiesanuova. In any case, the legendary Cimbrians must have died out by A.D. 814, when (as shown by documentary proofs, contracts of sale and lease, etc.) the greater part of the highlands belonged to Veronese monasteries† and nobles, and served to

* "Breonio," "Erhezzo," "Bosco," "Frizzolana" (now "Chiesanuova"), "Val di Porro," "Cerro," "Velo," "Campo," "Silvan," "Azarin," "Rovere di Velo," "Saline," "Tavernale," "Badia Calavena," "Selva di Progno," and "San Bartolomeo."

† Especially to the monastery of Sta. Maria, in Organo.

pasture their cattle. Then, about the middle of the XII. century, a nomadic German tribe drifted across the border to the Seven Communes, and soon, overflowing into Veronese territory, were allowed by the Bishop to settle on the Lessini. In 1376, another Bishop of Verona, Pietro della Scala, confirmed this permission by granting a twenty-five years' lease of the mountains to two German chiefs, Olderico of Altissimi and Olderico of Vicenza, who fixed their abode at Rovere di Velo, and seem to have acted as bailiffs to the Bishop, exercising judicial functions and privileged to nominate German priests. By this time the Commune of Forum Juliam, vulgarly styled Frezolana or Frizzolana, had, in honour of its big new church, changed its name to Chiesanuova. The pastoral Germans moved about the mountains as need required, and documents of the period record the still prevailing family names of Tinazzi, Becherle, Scandola, and Comperli. At Giazza, Selva di Progno and Campo Fontana, some of the old folk speak a German dialect.

Towards 1330 the Veronese ecclesiastics tried, by refusing long leases of their pastures, to check the rapid increase of the German element in the Thirteen Communes; but the "Masserios della Frezzolana" held their footing on the soil, and won privileges both from the Scaligeri and the Scaligeri's conqueror, Gian Galeazzo Visconti. To the new lord the "Masserios" did service in 1390, by routing a hostile tribe at Selva di Progno. In 1403, when Verona succumbed to Venice, the Twelve Communes were found to be a vicariate of the former city, and their privileges were left intact by the conquerors. In 1491 they volunteered a contribution of waggons and spingards to the defence of the State against Charles VIII.; but a ducal decree confirmed their right of exemption. In the next century the people of Frizzolana again received the formal thanks of the Republic for their aid during the war with Maximilian. Evidently, in spite of their Teutonic descent, they were staunch Italians. Strange to say, neither Machiavelli's nor Guicciardini's despatches contain any allusion to the German element

in the Vicentine and Veronese highlands. Nevertheless, when fortune favoured the Imperialists in 1509, Germany found many adherents at Verona. The people of the Lessini hastened to implore the confirmation of their old rights, and (oddly enough) their demand was made in Italian. Eight years afterwards Venice regained the Veronese State, and before long the mountaineers were obliged to nominate a "Protector of the Thirteen Communes" to look to their interests at St. Mark's. An influential patrician, usually a Senator, was always chosen for this office. During the eighteenth century a Donati and a Pisani held it in succession.

From the close of the seventeenth century the German element diminished in the mountains; much land had been appropriated by Veronese nobles; communes, monasteries, and private individuals, were perpetually disputing the possession of the pastures. To-day the Lessini grazing grounds are shared between local proprietors and the "Nobil Compagnia" of Verona, descendants of the old feudal lords.

There are no family seats in the democratic Lessini, no ruined castles. Save for Count Pullé's modern villa on Monte Tabor and an unfinished one behind, we must drive down to the outskirts of Verona to find a seigneurial house. At Scandole, however, on the brink of the Vajo dell'Anguilla, there stands a charming little cottage with a history. Now owned by a peasant-farmer of the old Scandola clan, it was built about a hundred years ago by the noble Ollibon of Val Pantena. This patrician led the life of a mediæval robber-Baron, oppressing tenants and vassals with feudal ferocity, terrorizing the whole country side, and keeping a band of bravi (in local parlance, "buli") to enforce obedience to his behests. His power fell from him when Napoleon seized Venetia. Stripped of his lands, and trembling for his life, Ollibon fled to his shooting-lodge at Scandole, conveniently near the Austrian border, and trusted to bolts and bars to save him from the vengeance of the mountaineers. Perhaps he was still guarded by "buli," for he seems to have dragged out his life un-

molested. Chiesanuova, however, had witnessed at least one of his crimes. Certain victims of his, flying there for safety, had been pursued by his men, and barbarously done to death.

Outwardly the Scandole house seems an ordinary cottage; but its walls are unusually solid, and its interior is daintily decorated with delicate stucco mouldings, faded frescoes, and elaborate roof beams. An altar on the landing, where mass was served, proves that Ollibon was of the privileged class, and it may have been used to soothe his remorse. The front door opens on a sunny little garden overhanging the steep of a wooded glen plunging into the Vajo dell'Anguilla. One looks down into the ravine and across to the townlet of Erbezzo on the height beyond. Midway along the sheer cliffs of this ravine, and overhung by bluffs of orange limestone, stretches a line of caves, regular as though shaped by human hands. With its southern outlook and landscape, this hermitage should be a cheerful abode. Three generations inhabit it now, and sturdy children are

romping among the flowers, while the friendly grandmother makes us welcome, and her deaf-and-dumb husband plucks the ripest cherries in our honour. The tyrant who ended his days here evidently sought safety as well as seclusion. We noticed that the back door on the mountain-side only led into a hay-loft, walled off from the rest of the building.

The carriage-road finishes at Scandole, a hamlet of a few thatched cottages, with a Revenue station to guard the pass from Tirol. A side glen winds up to Cimerlini, another small village in the folds of the hills.

A charming walk along the edge of the Vajo leads through firs, beechwoods, and pastures to tiny Val di Lera, where the only torrent of the Lessini speeds to the Vajo between banks of blue gentian. This is an enchanting nook, commanding a peep of really wild scenery, and the streamlet has a boastful voice for its size. "*Parmi les aveugles le borgne est roi.*" Scandole owns a bigger spring; but this, being captured in a trough when it first gushes from a cave

beneath the Ollibon house, has no chance of frisking noisily over the rocks.

The drive back to Chiesanuova is loveliest towards evening. Then, one enjoys the sunset over Lake Garda through the folds of the hills. This great sheet of water seems to have a climate of its own, a climate which, besides brewing the biggest storms, provides the grandest pageants and effects: gold, crimson, and lemon-green skies, with cloud processions even finer and more fantastic than those noted by Mr. Ruskin. Once, above the red horizon, soared groups of cumuli in the likeness of solid mountains, rent here and there by jagged defiles piercing to azure space, and all half-veiled by bars of silvery film. At this magical moment every tree, every blade of grass, seemed carved in gleaming metal; no leaf stirred; nature held her breath. Then the pageant vanished: even the afterglow faded, and we beheld to the east a sky of equal, coolest blue with the hardness and purity of polished stone.

About ten miles from Chiesanuova are the caves

and natural arch of Ponte di Veja. These are within easy reach from Verona, but few travellers visit them, and they have never been photographed. Half-way down to the plain, among the chestnuts of Val Pantena, one turns off on a by-road through the windings of Vajo del Falcone. Like the other ravines cleaving the foothills, this is walled by grand cliffs of orange limestone above tiers of caverns and wooded steeps. Unlike the rest, this Vajo has a torrent at the bottom, and other streamlets pour down from side gullies. The road twists round a huge bluff, and suddenly, across the glen high above we see a mighty bridge joining sundered cliffs of grey and yellow stone, and framing a space of sky, with tangled greenery and a chaos of rocks beneath. Over the lip of this lofty stage a cascade drops sheer into hidden depths, while the crags forming the side scenes are broken by the mouths of dark cavities leading to a subterranean world. The span of the natural bridge is about 130 feet on its western face, and over 160 on the other. Its summit is flat, and three carri-

ages might pass it abreast, with a margin for safety on either side. A fifteen-minutes climb through the brush landed us under the arch, by the mouth of the greater cavern. We were too heated to plunge into it at once. Clambering down the rocks to the torrent in the centre of the stage, we gazed out on the blazing mid-day world beneath, doubly grateful for the shade of our huge arch ; and, notwithstanding the wild grandeur of the scene, we were humanly interested in the contents of certain hampers about to be unpacked. Meanwhile there was glorious food for the eye. Salvator Rosa's Abruzzi rocks are tame compared with this wondrous achievement of limestone and water ; and the placid sky, arabesqued with tender foliage at the head of the glen behind, contrasted finely with the savagery of this Titanic portal. Before and beneath stretched the Vajo del Falcone, its orange walls twisting towards the mountains we had left.

In old times brigands must have nested in this eyrie : brigands ready to pounce down on all travellers,

or to raid fat kine on their way to Can Grande's larder, and able to vanish into the bowels of the earth at the first glint of steel in the valley. One can imagine them feasting at the table rock on which our modern provisions are spread, and their fires flaring up to the arch in defiance of baffled assailants. Meanwhile the present assembly—over twenty, great and small—is almost picturesque enough. Our choleric Major, hurling threats—and sandwiches—at his venturesome little sons, might pose as a robber chief; while big, peak-hatted Sauro, the guide, looks no less able to point a gun than to flourish a whip. Boys of all ages clamber about the rocks; two girls dabbling in the torrent send peals of laughter echoing among the crags; a maiden, wine-flask in hand, flits about us elders; one small urchin basking in the sun on a distant ledge, to remove the chill of an injudicious douche, looks like a gnome emerged from underground.

Lunch ended, the irrepressible boys burst into cheers as Sauro climbs the rocks with bundles of dry canes

to light our steps in the caves, and there is much squabbling as to who should be torch-bearers. Some of the party have already explored the smaller cavern to the left. Now we all pour into the greater one. Stumbling, slipping, splashing through mud, jumping pools, crawling bent double, through long, low corridors, following the guide as best we can in the uncertain flare of the torches, and with a swarm of excited youngsters at our heels, we penetrate a series of singular halls, some vast and wide, others mere clefts roofed at an unseen height, blackened with smoke, or dripping with water. So onwards for about half-a-mile, when the passage shrank to a hole only to be crawled through on all-fours, and Sauro announced that the boys had wasted so many torches there were barely enough to guide us back. It was tantalizing; for at the next turn the passage plunged (we were told) to a lower range of bigger caves lined by legions of bats, and never yet explored to the end. As it was, we reached daylight in a sufficiently weary, begrimed, and muddy state; the small fry torn and bruised.

Some years ago the valley folk regarded this cave as the mouth of hell. At nightfall (they said) the Evil One, armed with a pitchfork, and with horns and tail complete, was often seen emerging from it. Bold spirits determined to watch for the apparition. They were rewarded by the sight of a black figure with an enormous tail trailing behind him. The fiend proved to be a peasant alive to the advantage of using batguano for his crops. Anxious to monopolize the supply, he had gone secretly by night to fill the heavy sack he dragged at his heels.

The Prefect of Verona, Count Sormanni Moretti, is much interested in these wonderful caves, and hopes some day to organize a scientific expedition to explore them. They are known to extend through the mountain in several tiers; and proofs of their prehistoric habitation—stores of flint knives, triangular arrowheads of a singular kind, tusks of extinct animals, and primitive implements of the earliest iron age—have already been brought to light.

It is worthy of note that the torrent under the

bridge does not come down from the cliffs behind. It issues from a cave. Probably, therefore, the space spanned by the Ponte di Veja was once a huge rock chamber, the roof of which has partly given way. Who knows? It may have been the throne-room or temple of a troglodyte race!

CHAPTER 11.

BORDIGHERA AND ITS ASSOCIATIONS.

I.

CAN anything fresh be said of the coast between Genoa and Bordighera? Have not too many pens described the mavelous panorama of bays and headlands, green vales, snow-capped peaks, hoary towers, clustered towns, orange groves and olive slopes revealed in swift glimpses between the tunnels of the Mediterranean line?

But the sea has varied moods—moods of gloom, of languor, of raging storm, is not always quivering and sparkling as on this brilliant, breezy April day, when shallows of turquoise, and sapphire deeps are fringed with white breakers in every cove, and plumes of spray dancing over jagged black rocks. All is so

gladsome, one cannot grumble even at tunnels. It is tantalizing, perhaps, to dive through cliffs and be whirled from an earthly paradise into gulfs of blackness and smoke. But the transformation scenes! Are they not reward enough, and charmingly fitted to the sensational temper of the age?

In the "Vetturino" days of leisurely "long-ago" it was possible to be satiated with the splendours of the land; there were moments when the power of enjoyment died out. I once had companions on this road who slumbered most of the way and asked to be roused only at specially beautiful bits. Dear companions, whose journeyings, alas, are all done, and now sleep the sleep from which no cry of mine can awake them!

In those times San Remo was little more than a village, "Dr. Antonio" only just written. English sympathizers, groaning over Italy's wrongs, petted that clever young exile, Ruffini, and raved about his book, but had faint hopes of Italian independence. Italy was very dear to us then. She inspired a tender interest—as for some oppressed and beautiful maiden

—and though, practically, we never did much to help her out of bondage, we watched her struggles with honest solicitude. But now that the maiden has cast off her chains, is wedded to Freedom, and blossomed into a buxom, rather commonplace, matron, chiefly harassed by the financial problem of how to keep her place in the world on too slender means, our interest in her has decidedly and unjustly slackened. She seems to be almost thrust out of our hearts, as out of our literature; our critics are rough on "Italianate Englishmen," and publishers sneer at Italian themes. Even the Renaissance period is becoming a drug in the market.

Among all the English who flock to San Remo, I doubt whether more than one in twenty still reads Ruffini, or makes pilgrimage to Taggia for his sake. At any rate, not those of the rising generation! Yet this is only natural, for reasons to be referred to farther on. And it is equally natural, in the whirligig of time, for the general sympathy to have veered on new tacks. A while ago, at San Remo,

it was centred on the square white mansion up on the hill where the noblest prince of modern days fought his brave battle with death.

Popular San Remo is altogether too big, too towny and fashionable for those in need of country quiet, neither does the neighbouring health-station of Ospedalletti, with its spick and span hotels, glaring Casino and embryo promenades, offer any special attraction. But round the next turn of the coast lies enchanting Bordighera, with its grand headland thrusting forth over the sea, and its crown of ancient walls rising above thickets of roses and forests of olives and palms. Modern innovation has not yet destroyed the old-world charm of Bordighera.

Once outside the station you are in a scene of Eastern poetry, with mediæval illustrations. Oranges and palms meet overhead as you wind slowly upwards to the hotel on the rock by the city gate; silvery olives stretch this side and that in soft, shceny masses; steep stone stairs cleave the car-

riage road and form a most pictorial background to browsing goats and pitcher-crowned girls. Soon, the avenues of greenery left behind, a sudden turn round the crest of the "Cape" displays the curves of the coast away to the Gulf of Mentone, the Esterels, and range after range of western peaks. Prostrate palms, newly felled and encumbering the road, supply another note of local colour, for they might be part of the grove that adorned the headland in the days of "Dr. Antonio."

Ancient mariners, all tan and wrinkles, with hairy caps and queer brown clothes, are squatting by the town wall watching the energetic movements of younger folk engaged in the game of "Pallone." Tunnel-like archways here and there reveal vistas of dim arcades and precipitous steps.

We are enchanted with it all, and still more so on finding that the rooms assigned to us face the glories of sea and shore, with a plot of lilies and roses under one window and a thicket of palms beneath another.

To the world in general Bordighera is chiefly renowned for its climate, scenery, and almost tropical vegetation, but to the present writer, long exiled from home, not the least of its fascinations was the all-pervading influence of British energy. No wonder that Italians consider us overbearing "invadenti"! It is amazing to behold how English respectability and cleanliness, English solidity and order have seized on this southern fishing village and planted the Union Jack firmly in its midst. Even the old town, a labyrinth of huddled lanes and vaulted passages clasped within lofty walls, has partially succumbed to British influence and almost become clean; while the new quarter, specially affected by the colony, among the olives and oranges of the Via Romana is a luxuriant, idealized rendering of the usual trimly pleasant comfort of solid English suburban homes. Also the busy street down by the sea, has somewhat of a British stamp on its modern Italian face. We find an English banker there, an English bakery, and a circulating library and general

shop kept by the neat English wife of a black-visaged Italian. Nevertheless the insular commercial element has not disdained to adopt the continental mode of catering for British needs at a high rate of interest, and, of course, one may not haggle in an English shop.

Meanwhile, native proprietors reap a rich harvest, from our invalids. The ancient olive groves, sheltered from all cold winds, where lines of huge knotted trunks rise from carpets of flowers and form avenues of silver-green shade are fast falling under the axe, and parcelled out in building lots at forty thousand francs the acre. So the grand old trees are doomed, for bricks and mortar yield more than olive crops.

At the end of the Via Romana is a tangled garden, also marked for sale, that might be the shrine of a "Sleeping Beauty." It is a jungle of orange trees loaded with over-ripe fruit, of palms and aloes and trailing tea roses, and never a path between. Only a slim fairy prince, cased in mail and

battle-axe in hand, could force a way through those thickets. Probably some common-place empty house lies behind, but we preferred to leave the mystery unsolved.

The tourist greed for flowers that has already stripped the hills of their rarer plants, has evidently stirred residents to self-defence, for at many gates notice boards inscribed, "Private," and "Do not take the flowers," in big capitals, warn off our countrymen's predatory fingers.

A pleasanter proof of insular energy, is the number of very ancient English women to be seen at Bordighera. Women so stricken in years, that if of other nationality, they would have long ceased from wandering, and resigned themselves to their home climate. But here they are, these good ladies, bravely travelling alone, and unmistakably British from the crowns of their capped heads to the soles of their sensible shoes. Their wonderful bonnets—well down over the cars, with comfortable flaps behind—often framing the sweetest old faces—are in force in the English Church,

while on every road one meets their stout forms bent on errands of mercy, with heavy baskets on their arms, and stores of philanthropy in their kindly souls. They found hospitals for sick peasants, adopt waifs and strays, teach orphans to read and sew. These splendid old ladies have always strength for good works, and refuse to sit idle in a foreign land. Of course, there are some of another type, soured women solely devoted to their own health, wintering abroad to escape east winds, with no altruistic aims, and who only raise their heads from the last *Times* in hotel parlours, to burst into diatribes against Italy in general and Italian railway robbers in particular. To such as these, one grudges Bordighera. A glass-house in the dreariest part of the Fens would suit their breathing apparatus quite as well as the unappreciated loveliness that fails to charm away their discontent.

On all sides the English element is strong ; has not only invaded Bordighera itself, but scaled the hills for miles round. Wandering by bridle paths among olive glades and rose farms, you are startled by the

sound of British voices, and sun-bonneted, blue-eyed children peep at you over a geranium hedge, or through the bars of a garden gate. Above the old town, almost on a level with the tip of the church cupola, an English artist has made his nest. A hedge of roses parts his domain from the olive steep, behind whence indiscreet gazers can peer into his studio. His red-brick loggia commands the widest view of the sea and coast, and this cosy paradise has "Bellosguardo" appropriately inscribed on its door. Even wind and sea have an English quality, this boisterous Easter-tide. Waves dash over the rocks of St. Ampelio with a truly Atlantic vigour, and the gale, blowing your umbrella inside-out as you struggle across the turf on the "Cape," has the force of a British sou' wester. To be braced and exhilarated under rose-festooned palms with flowering geraniums and heliotropes all about is an unexpected joy. There is indignation, however, in the wild tossing of the palms; they seem to be protesting to heaven against the rough play of the wind.

The centre and heart of the English settlement is a

certain flower-girt mansion that sheds good influences on all sides. This is the home of George Macdonald. One may cross its threshold in print without betrayal of private hospitality, for on Sunday evening its doors stand open to all-comers. You pass upstairs into a spacious, softly-lit room already crowded with people. Pictures gleam on grey-green walls, there are flowers everywhere, books, portfolios, musical instruments. Logs flame cheerily in a huge, tiled hearth; and there by the fireside, facing the reverent throng, sits a gentle, white-haired man, Bible in hand, expounding the law of Christ in eloquent northern speech. It is no formal harangue, but rather a friendly discourse upon holy things. These gatherings must be the truest solace to sufferers driven abroad by stress of disease, and one realizes how comfortingly the familiar accents must speak to their hearts, and what hope be gleaned from the inspiring atmosphere of the preacher's home. It is worthily named "Casa Coraggio," the house of courage. On other occasions, the busy writer steals time from his work

to give his friends readings from the poets ; his great room is the frequent scene of social and charitable assemblies, while the varied gifts of the family, dramatic and musical, are constantly turned to account in aid of some benevolent scheme. Since my visit a heavy grief has darkened this delightful home, but though its happiness is dimmed by bereavement, we know that its good works are as active as ever.

II.

Bordighera is full of literary associations. The author of "Hurrish" (Miss Lawless) owns a nest in the hills, and has described their charms in another book. Mrs. Oliphant is a frequent visitor, and has placed the scene of a fascinating romance in the old town of the "Cape." One half expected to find her winning girl-heroine still sketching the mountains from the terrace on the city wall, or climbing the foot track from the railway with the perplexing strangers whom her father tried to avoid. Indeed, so far as we

English are concerned, Bordighera may be said to owe its existence to literary associations. Ruffinis' "Dr. Antonio" first called our attention to the place, and every visitor came armed with a copy of the book. Nowadays few read that touching romance from cover to cover. People dip into it, find it dull and old-fashioned, and quickly throw it aside. Some, perhaps, lack the imagination to conceive a Bordighera without an English doctor, or fail to see why Sir John Davenne should have endured the discomforts of L'Osteria del Mattonc, round the corner of the "Cape," when there are so many good hotels to which Lucy could have been conveyed without risk to her broken limb.

Also, and this is more to the point, since "Dr. Antonio" took the reading world by storm, literature has undergone a transformation as great as that of Italy in general, or Bordighera in particular. "Dr. Antonio" is hopelessly old-fashioned, and has not the artistic force to defy changed modes of thought. What quiet idyll of unhappy love seasoned with historical

retrospect and the horrors of Neapolitan dungeons can now charm the public ear? The type of meek heroine who submits to be bullied by a brother and married off to the wrong man is utterly extinct. In these advanced times a Lucy Davenne would brave her family—at least to the extent of remaining single—and if her dear doctor did not come to England to seek her, would probably go to seek him under pretext of making an art-tour with some girl-friend from Newnham or Girton. She would probably find her Antonio released from his chains and an active member of the Italian Parliament. They might meet with feelings of mutual disappointment and spend a volume in talking themselves into second love, or they might quickly rush into matrimony and regret it at leisure. In either case they would pass their holidays at Bordighera—on account of Lucy's weak lungs—and as time went on the doctor would be horribly bored by swarms of English visitors, and Lucy deeply annoyed by his refusing to wear a tail-coat when some of them came to dinner. Or, if the book

must needs have a tragic end, Antonio's sufferings in prison would lead to softening of the brain—realistically described—and poor Lucy in gaining her heart's desire would have to devote her life to nursing an imbecile husband. The real book is too simple and unanalytical for the complex modern taste ; its satire on British prejudice is too one-sided and over-charged to serve as a contribution to international studies of character, and—worst of all—as the English work of a foreign pen, it has no distinctive charm of style or diction.

Painters must be in paradise at Bordighera, for it is full of artistic themes. The old town, viewed from the Via Romana, with church towers and cypresses rising above the masses of tropical foliage is a perfect composition ; vaulted gateways frame land and sea scapes of exquisite beauty, and the coast line to the west is one of the grandest scenes of the Riviera. From the rose-wreathed terrace of Villa Garnier one looks to the sea through bowers of olives and clustered palms, or across a gulf of greenery to the old colony

of the Knights of Rhodes—Colla di Rodi—gleaming white up aloft on the spur of Monte Nero. Figure subjects likewise abound. Water bearers, climbing the causeway, with copper pails lightly poised on their heads ; olive pickers in the woods ; groups of fisher-folk ; pedlers spreading multi-coloured wares on terrace walls, surrounded by red-stockinged girls wistfully seeking a bargain, and troops of children pouring out of school, venting their energies in free fights and friskings on the turf. Then there is the quaint little chapel of St. Ampelio on the rocks by the sea, enclosing the cave—hermitage of Bordighera's Saint. But the patron's bones no longer rest there. They proved literally bones of contention, and after being first ravished to San Remo were finally enshrined in a Genoese church.

Just above the chapel, on the tongue of the "Cape," a ruined fort recalls a droll episode of Napoleon's rule in Liguria. In 1811, an English cruiser becalmed off the "Cape," was driven in shore by the current, whereupon the garrison of St. Ampelio joyfully pointed

their guns and sent several shots through the cabin windows. Unable to return the fire, the captain of the vessel ordered out his boats, was towed beyond range, and presently drew off leaving Bordighera triumphant. But the insult was not to remain unavenged. One day two English frigates sailed in and began to shell the town. There was a frenzy of alarm ; one or two chimneys crashed down, and Bordighera promptly surrendered. Thereupon the Mayor was ordered on board the flagship, treated to an excellent dinner, and sent home at night with changed sentiments towards the English.

Gentler foes these than the Barbary pirates, who were formerly a terror to the coast. On a lofty hill behind the town the Mostaccini tower lifts stout walls above the trees. Hence constant watch was kept for suspicious sail, and fires often flashed from its turrets to signal other posts of defence.

Now peaceful olives are its only wardens, and the iron door at the head of the stoop guards nothing more formidable than spades and hoes. On the inland

side of this rock, above the Borghetto Valley, are the ruins of a second tower, whence warning could be given to a dozen mountain villages and strongholds. Here grand snow-crests rise into view beyond green ridges and purple peaks ; white hamlets cling to the lower slopes, and grey castles stand defiant on isolated crags. This background suggests petty warfare and feudal oppression ; one can scarcely realize that the deadliest danger came from the smiling sea, where now a few fishing boats are gliding white and harmless towards the curves of Mentone's bay. One could dream away hours on the thyme-scented turf by the tower ! But the level beams of the sun call us to our feet. Old Bordighera on its hill to the east is near enough as the crow flies, but for us wingless mortals, only to be reached by many steps.

One always speaks of "Old" Bordighera to distinguish the walled upper town from the new suburb by the sea, and the English colony about the Via Romana. Yet, in fact, the borough—a miniature

edition of San Remo—has no great antiquity to boast of, only dating from 1470, when, probably for the convenience of the fisheries—it was founded by thirty-two citizens of Borghetto.

The name was derived from *bordigue*, the local term for a creek, and in all old records is spelt Bordighetto. Equally with its parent town, it was under the suzerainty of the Count of Ventimiglia, but after two centuries of harassed existence and perpetual strife with the Genocse, the exactions of its feudal chief became too intolerable. So, in 1686, Bordighera and seven other townships threw off the yoke and united in the so-called "Confederation of the Eight towns," enjoyed a hundred years of free government only ended by the coming of the French.

One of the most interesting drives about Bordighera is up the Nervia valley to the Doria castle of Dolceacqua. As soon as the road turns off inland Alpine summits begin to be seen, and the stern cliffs of Monte Toraggio have a grand effect, rising snow-capped to the clouds above the gentle foreground of

olive woods and flowery pastures. Soon an avenue of budding planes leads to the gates of Camporosso, a walled village of shadowy streets with a crooked piazza in its midst. Here stands a frescoed church, and from the balustrades of its entrance steps, mermaids spout water into a pair of stone basins. This double fountain has the merit of novelty.

Another mile or so of the pleasant vale brought us to Dolceacqua, with its ruined castle perched above a torrent of brown roofs at the mouth of a side glen. Leaving the carriage in the modern street, and crossing the river by a high peaked footbridge, we plunged into a labyrinth of stone, a pot pourri of the wildest freaks of Ligurian village architecture. It is a feudal rabbit warren of narrow lanes and tunnels, clinging to a rock where occasional shafts of light, darting between arches overhead, produce wonderful effects of chiaroscuro. Branch tunnels dive to right and left, and ladder-like stairs cleave frowning walls. One looks through cellar mouths to sunlit openings beyond. A specially long dark passage led down to

a cloistered court, and there, perched on a broken parapet in the only spot touched by the sun, was a lovely child, with a shining, rosy apple-face. The warren seems fittingly prolific ; for a chorus of small voices from casements above and stones beneath, insistently clamoured for pence. More bratlings, attracted like flies by our lunch basket, swarmed at our heels, and the guardian of the castle, a bright-eyed, toothless young matron, remarked that the key required to let us in was powerless to keep the boys out. " They climbed the walls like cats," she added, " and were so tiresome that we had better not picnic inside the ruins." But even her private potato patch in an orange garden by the castle wall, and over-topping the village, proved no refuge from the small fry. Half a dozen enterprising spirits ran us to earth, and, planted a foot or so from our mouths, watched every morsel we ate. The secret of our guide's solicitude for our comfort was explained by seeing her rush off to her own dinner as soon as she had settled us among the potatoes. Poor thing !

It was Easter Sunday, and, doubtless, a scrap of roast lamb and a big flat cake, studded with crimson eggs, were ready for her and her children at home. We had seen a procession of these famous cakes, poised on women's heads, marching to the Bordighera bakery the previous night.

The Dolceacqua stronghold is a grand, Renaissance building, with four square towers let into its arcaded walls, and a stout keep and prison tower in the central court. The façade is riddled with bullet-marks, commemorating the capture and sack of the castle by Massena's troops. Though ravaged by war, its sturdy strength seems to defy natural agencies, for even the earthquake of 1887 that destroyed part of the village beneath, failed to dislodge one stone from its walls. The four towers command enchanting landscapes, and on two sides the rock-platform falls sheer to the valley. Near the round donjon in the inner court, among yawning vaults and mounds of grass-grown masonry, is the shattered fountain of "sweet water" from the hills, to which the castle owes its name.

But the duct is broken, the fountain dry. Nothing suggests melancholy or decay in this sun-flooded ruin. It resembles a strong man cut off in his prime ; an arrested vitality defiant even in death. But the keen mountain wind called such strange murmurs from dungeons beneath and cloisters above, such long-drawn wails and moans, that it was disappointing to learn that the castle had neither legends nor ghosts. It was absolutely unhaunted, according to our guide ; had not even the usual tradition of buried treasure.

Dolcacqua still belongs to a branch of the Doria line. Our coachman proudly informed us that he had married into the family, and that his wife owned one third of the castle. We hoped her share included more than old stones : some olive terrace behind the walls, or a scrap of vineyard in the glen round the corner where the potent, white Perinaldo wine is made.

Driving homewards along the peaceful shore, it was hard to realize the horrors of Easter-tide a few short years ago. Then, as now, all were making festi-

val in church and square, when suddenly the earth opened, walls crashed, thousands perished and thousands more were reduced to starvation. Bordighera itself suffered little. The worst shock there came at night, and the Grand Hotel was the only house that was hopelessly ruined. A lady, who was staying in it at the time, says the shock was so tremendous, accompanied by such awful sounds, that feeling sure the end of the world had come she remained trembling in her bed "thinking last thoughts," until roused by shrieks for aid from the neighbouring room.

Even in this earthly paradise we may not forget that life is "death-bound," and that this sunlit soil may give a grisly welcome to those spared by disease.

CHAPTER III.

VAL BREGAGLIA.

I

IN ancient times a Rhaetian highway, in the Middle Ages "Pregell," "VII jurisdiction of the Gotteshausbund," in all times much devastated by war, this busy valley, home of stout patriots and traders, is now chiefly known as a convenient approach to the Engadine. From Chiavenna, the road winds up through the hills by the edge of the swift-flashing Maira. The scenery remains southern for a while : vines, chestnuts, dry torrent beds, spreading like white fans at the feet of sunburnt crags, picturesque, tumbledown hamlets and bell-towers half hidden in the woods. Presently, across stream, the mountains shrink back, and a

chaos of wooded knolls and moss-grown rocks marks the site of long-buried Piuro. In old times this was an important city, almost the size of Chiavenna, and famed for refinement and luxury. For Piuro was the resort of great merchants, engaged in the wealthy carrying trade between Germany, Italy and the East, who took their pleasure here while keeping an eye to business with silk mills and slate quarries. Their palaces were filled with treasure of art, rich tapestries and brocades, while their gardens, sheltered from Alpine blasts by protecting mountains, rivalled those of the Riviera in luxuriance of vegetation. But one summer night, in 1618, the peak overhanging the quarries, tall Monte Conto, gave way, and suddenly crashed down on the unfortunate city. Scarcely anyone escaped, and thousands of human beings lie buried beneath the rocks amid ruined homes and stores of wealth. In this age of speculation and dynamite it seems strange that no company should have been started for exhuming the treasures of Piuro.

A few miles on, shingled chalets begin to appear. We pass the Italian Custom-house that will be so unpleasant on our return south, and unmolested by the wiser guardians of Swiss interests, enter the Republic at prosperous Castasegna. Soon Italian accents are heard again, but the frontier is marked by German speech, German schopps of beer at the café. Looking up the narrow street, as through a telescope, we see straight ahead a white church on a lofty cliff, and are told it is Soglio, the goal of our journey. It vanishes at the next turn and grander scenes come in view. The Bondasca glacier glitters on high amid bristling peaks, vines yield to walnuts, and the chestnuts retreat to our side of the river, stretching for miles in billows of velvet, the finest chestnut forest of Switzerland. Across the Maira, pinewoods stream down the mountain flank, cloven by frequent cascades, to a belt of larches and pastures. We pass the De Salis manor house, squarely planted in a meadow near Bondo, backed by the precipices barricading the valley, and soon turn up a side road through the

forest. What is this idyllic village of chalets and barns clustered on the grass among the huge trees? Can it be Soglio? But where are the inhabitants? All doors and windows are closed; there is no sound no smoke, no trace of living beings! Our driver laughingly explains that the "village" is only a group of "Cascine" for the drying of chestnuts and storing of hay. Nobody lives here save for a week or so in autumn when the prickly harvest is ripe. Yet one of these broad huts, near the streamlet flashing down from the rocks, and commanding such lovely views through bowers of greenery would be a sweeter summer home than any inn.

The next turn of the road brings us face to face with a mighty cascade—the Caroggia—which after plunging into a fairy pool, vanishes in the sea of chestnuts beneath on its way to the river. And there is Soglio, still far above. Beside the white church seen from the frontier stands a gaunt new house on the brink of the cliff, and we are glad to know it is not our hotel. Leaving the forest behind,

we mount past steep grassy slopes to the shelf on which Soglio is perched, overhung by jagged rocks and perpendicular pinewoods. The village is unattractive at first sight as we jolt through crooked, narrow lanes, bordered by dunghcaps and grimy dwellings of primitive Alpine architecture. The population apparently consists of a few old women squatted on doorsteps and a dozen stolidly staring children. All the men are up at the "Alps" making cheese and hay. But now comes a pleasant surprise. Our carriage wriggles out of a squalid lane on to an open space lined on one side by stout stone houses with bulging iron balconies, and halts at the door of a massive Renaissance building with a group of tall poplars rising to its roof. This is the hotel, and English faces peep out beneath the blue sun blinds on the first floor. It is a mansion, belonging to the De Salis family, but deserted by them half a century ago, and now let to an inn-keeper. A tall slice of a house at the corner of the Piazza is a part of the original nest of the Soglio branch of the clan that was

once so powerful in the Grisons and scattered records in stone throughout the canton.

But the hotel is specially fascinating. Built regardless of expense when the family fortunes were at their zenith over two hundred years ago, every detail is in harmony with the general design, and most intelligently carried out. The entrance is guarded by double doors of stout, sculptured oak. A long, vaulted banqueting room furnished with huge, carved presses, baionial chairs and a hooded hearth occupies nearly half the ground floor. A stone staircase arranged in short, arched flights, with branches to garden and side wing, leads past an entresol, or low first floor, to the second story, that after the Venetian style, is the grandest portion of the house. Here a central hall rises to the roof, decorated with stands of armour, weapons, escutcheons and family portraits, while open galleries on two sides lead to attics above. This picturesque interior is lighted by a huge window looking out on the poplars and pines of the garden beneath. A weeping willow, the crest of the clan, is

carved on the mantel-shelf, and opposite, between steel clad effigies, hangs a very rare engraving of Kaiser Leopold I., surrounded by emblems of war and peace. The state rooms open from this hall, and our landlady proudly ushers us into a chamber of startling luxury and refinement. Walls covered with rich satin brocade, green and white, in excellent preservation, above a dado of chestnut root ; doors with massive frames of the same wood, carved in delicate arabesques ; chairs and sofas likewise of green and white satin, and so charming to the eye that it seemed frivolous to regret the absence of modern stuffing. But the bedstead is the glory of the room. It has thick, twisted columns, fit to shield the slumbers of a Doge, a carved head-board of dolphins supporting a knight's helm decked with three plumes, arranged like the Prince of Wales' feathers, and is draped with soft flowered silk of faded red, blue and yellow. The ceiling is decorated with mouldings of green and white stucco, in accordance with the classic and military tastes of the founder of the house. Homer,

Aristotle, Alexander of Macedon and Numa Pompilius are enshrined in the four corners, while a larger medallion between the windows represents the periwigged profile of Frederick the Great, encircled by this legend :—

“*Federicus unicus Borusorum rex, quis in omnibus superavit omnes.*” This supplied a proximate date at least of the decorations of the house; but an enquiry from the flippant member of our party as to why the monarch of Borussia always sat upon everybody in an omnibus, was received with merited contempt.

Our delightful chamber is flooded with sunshine, commands a fine view of the Bondasca glacier, mountains and forests, and is musical with the murmur of the village fountain. There are other good rooms right and left, wainscotted, stuccoed, and with more or less ancient furniture, but none to compare with this green and white nest.

It was strange to find so stately a dwelling in the midst of an Alpine hamlet, with rustic roofs pressing forward across the irregular piazza. But the De Salis

were lords of the district, doubtless loved to impress their vassals by a display of wealth, and found it convenient to have them within call. A secret stair from this floor to an exit in a side-lane gives an impression of mystery, intrigue, and midnight messengers. Could stones speak one might learn some strange stories. But there is not even a family ghost to be evoked ; only the vague tradition of a family saint : one Demoiselle de Salis who ended a life of austerity in a cupboard-like cell in the roof. Nevertheless, in stormy weather, the old house is full of queer sounds. One night the turmoil was maddening. Doors banged everywhere, though all were fast closed. First below stairs with thunderous claps, as if hastily shut against invaders,* then up and up to this higher floor. Hurrying out into the central hall to investigate the cause of the disturbance, I was startled by the bang of the very door whose handle I was actually grasping, and had just ascertained to be locked. And the next moment the sound was repeated by another closed door in the open gallery overhead, and before my

eyes. So, probably, it was my own fault if I saw no ghosts. The uproar continued all night. The fountain babbled intermittent whispers, there was a murmur as of human voices in the trees, nay, even in the rattling of the iron window-blinds. It seemed as though all these indefinite sounds must suddenly resolve into articulate speech.

The garden of this Soglio house is another relic of bygone splendour. It is laid out in the old Italian style, with terraced walks and squares of flowers and vegetables, divided by broad, clipped, evergreen hedges. Great stone tables and benches are ranged on the lawn by the steps; there are vine arbours against the south wall, a broken fountain and shady trellis, bird-haunted cherry and pear trees, a few tall poplars and an Arolla pine. But gooseberry and currant bushes, cabbage roses, York and Lancaster roses, phlox, lilies, single pinks and fragrant kitchen herbs recall memories of rustic English homes. It is a pleasant retreat these July days. The air is musical with bird voices, the humming of bees, the trickling of water; primrose

butterflies dance joyous *pas de deux*, red cherries glow like rubies in the sunlight. But pressed against the mountain that has more than once threatened to overwhelm it, and with buildings on either side, this garden has no view, save from the end of the upper walk, whence a tiny glimpse of distant crags and ice may be obtained. Seclusion, however, is an added charm, and sets one's imagination to work. Perhaps the saintly Demoiselle may have paced between these hedges, and the fair young matron, whose portrait graces the hall above, plucked posies here to greet the return of her lord. The De Salis ladies must have led anxious lives with their men folk always away on foreign campaigns, or fighting political battles at Sondrio and Chur.

But visions of the past are soon shattered by a very vigorous present, as three little Scotch girls came tearing down the steps, shouting for their boy friend at the swing. Their six legs fly like the wind, sun-bonnets trail down three backs. In a moment pretty Nora, sturdy Hilda, and golden-haired Rachel have pounced on their prey, and their willing slave sends

them flying by turns up among the pear branches overhead. Then new invaders, the landlord's children, burst in by a side door; a stout, stolid boy and a freakish imp of a girl who is so wild in her fun that no one would think she had already raced miles to Promontogno and back laden with mail bags.

II.

ONE could not stay at Soglio without becoming curious concerning the history of its old lords. The village echoes as it were with the De Salis' name, is filled with broken scutcheons and other relics of their state. All the biggest houses were once theirs, and a second spacious pleasure garden at the edge of the cliff, now turned to homelier uses. It was tantalizing, while only able to glean stray scraps of information, to know that the material we sought was under the same roof with us in a jealously closed room. The present owner of the house, Baron Goubert de Salis of Chur, has retained the key of his library

and denies admittance to all. Yet when the room was last opened some years ago its contents were already much damaged by neglect and damp. The pity of it! For besides family records, there are many valuable books, many documents, illustrating the progress of the Reformation in Switzerland and Italy.

A Promontogno coachman who drove us up the hill one day was our first historian of the De Salis line. But he treated his theme from a modern and republican point of view, exulting greatly in the changes wrought by time. The De Salis were despots, he said, who spread their claws all over the valley and for centuries went on increasing in wealth and strength. Woe to the vassal who failed to pay his dues! No mercy was shown him, and his farms or pastures were swept into the grasp of his feudal chief. Now, happily, all men were equal, and the vast De Salis domains split into small holding. According to tradition, the maker of the race was a foundling picked up by a passing Samaritan at the foot of the

willow tree recorded in the family arms. This brat made his way in the world under the name of De Salicibus, and is supposed to have built the first family nest at Castellatsch, or Castellazzo, near Castasegna, now a ruin of unknown date.

John de Müller, the historian of the Swiss Confederation, refers to the family as having resided in the valley, "*depuis la nuit des temps.*" The guide-book, "*Das Thal Bregell,*" states, on the authority of a still existing document, dated 930, that when the Archbishop Hatto of Mainz came to Italy as envoy from the Empire, he was met at the summit of the Septimer Pass by two Rhoetian nobles, Rudolf and Andreas de Salis, who entertained him sumptuously at their castle of Castellatsch and paid him nine *solidos* (gold coins) as tribute on the lands they held by grace of King Conrad. But the authenticity of this old document is disputed, and the present head of the house, Count John De Salis—to whom we are indebted for some of the following particulars—considers that there is good reason to think it a forgery.

According to the author of "Das Thal Bregell," the Salische Burg (Castellatsch) was entirely demolished during the strife between Como and the Bishop of Chur that was carried on from 1208 to 1219; but this statement also only rests upon tradition. At any rate the castle must have been afterwards rebuilt, for a picture of it dated early in this century shows that a good part of it was still standing. By other accounts, Castellatsch was deserted five hundred years ago.

In fact, until the fourteenth century there is no well-authenticated information on the De Salis. But a "Codex Diplomaticas" of Chur, dated 1330, contains a declaration of war against the De Salis as allies of the Bishop of Chur, on the part of Jonathan of Vatz and his kinsmen, the Counts of Werdenberg and Sargans, the very potentates whose fall led to the erection of the Republic of the Three Leagues. This proves that before the middle of the fourteenth century the house had risen to power, and after this date numerous deeds of sale and purchase of land and

other legal documents record the doings of the family.

Henceforth, they played a prominent part in local history while sending many sons to reap laurels abroad. Wherever Swiss troops fought, a De Salis was sure to be among them, and often commanding a regiment bearing his name. Generation after generation bore arms under the lilies of France, and more than one De Salis perished in the defence of the Tuileries. There were Austrian De Salis, Marshals and Counts of the Holy Roman Empire, others in the service of Holland, Spain and small German states. May's "*Histoire Militaire de la Suisse*" perfectly bristles with their name. The chief branch of the family migrated to England sometime in the eighteenth century, and is now represented by Count John Francis De Salis, Deputy Lieutenant for Limerick, and attaché to the British Legation at Brussels. This gentleman owns the family mansion at Bondo, and I am indebted to his kindness for much information.

One of the sturdiest and most interesting members

of the clan was Marshal Ulysses De Salis, who has left us a very graphic account of his military career. But having written about him at length elsewhere,* I need only say that he belonged to the Soglio branch, and was probably born there in 1594, in a house afterwards destroyed by the Spaniards in 1621. One of these family dwellings, lauded by a contemporary chronicler as "*cam egregiam domum*," belonged to Colonel Baptista de Salis, and must have been built in the preceding century, when the conquest of the Valtelline brought wealth to the Grison's chiefs.

The existing houses, *i.e.* : the grand Renaissance mansion and two smaller ones in the same style were probably begun after peace was restored at the end of the Valtelline war, and finished about the middle of the seventeenth-century. One would like to know something of the artist who designed this palace and also of the eighteenth-century De Salis who loved Aristotle and Frederick the Great ; but, alas ! these particulars are buried in the inaccessible archives.

* Eng. Hist. Review, April, 1891.

As for Soglio itself, beyond being occasionally plundered and burnt, in common with other border hamlets during the many wars that raged up and down the valley, it can only boast one interesting event. This was its sudden conversion to Protestantism. The reformed doctrines introduced into Rhætia, in 1530, by Bartolommeo Maturo of Cremona quickly spread throughout Val Bregaglia. Soglio alone for more than twenty years still remained firm to the old faith. But, in 1552, the inhabitants were fuming with slow indignation against their priest, one Ulrich, locally known as *Pré Duric*. This man was a notorious evil-liver, his vices were the theme of popular rhymes and squibs, and he was even accused of corrupting children committed to his charge. One Sunday he was teaching the Catechism in church, when a small boy, instead of giving the fitting response, scoffingly shouted a coarse pasquinade against him. Thereupon all the mothers present rose up in fury. This vile priest was intolerable. And there was only one way to get rid of him. Rushing

home to their husbands they prayed them to adopt the new faith without delay. The men took fire, and after brief discussion trooped to the great house and laid the matter before Governor Johann Baptista de Salis and his brother Prefect Anton, whose wife, by the way, was sister to the Lord Bishop of Chur.

Bowing to the storm, these gentlemen replied that although personally obliged to retain the old faith, the villagers were free to discard it. But while the elders were hesitating before so momentous a step, the youth of Soglio, gathered in the meadow still known as "Pian di Lutero" (Luther's field), quickly agreed to adopt their mother's counsel and cast off the errors of papacy.

Said and done! The wicked priest was dragged forth and hurled over the precipice, the church cleared of emblems and images, and a pastor summoned to preach the new faith. No voice was raised against this rough mode of reform. On the contrary, in gratitude to those who had achieved it, a law was passed granting in perpetuity to the youth of Soglio

the right of electing one of their number to the Board of Justices of the Peace for Val Bregaglia with the title of "*Juventutis judex*." And for three centuries this privilege held good!

Nowadays, it is curious to remember that the first Protestant pastors of Soglio were all of Italian birth: Lactantius of Berganio, Michel Angelo Florius of Florence, Giovanni Martius of Siena and Michele Terentio of Naples.

But the form of worship at Soglio and throughout Val Bregaglia differs from that of Lutherans elsewhere. The congregation is not allowed to join in the singing, nor even to use hymnals. Only bachelors and spinsters may be members of the choir. Once married they must leave it, and sit in silence with the matrons at the lower end of the nave, or among the elders in the seats facing the pulpit. There is no organ at Soglio, and the lusty voices of the choir keep better time than tune. The service begins with a hymn, and the congregation stand while the minister mounts the pulpit and reads a prayer. Then comes

the sermon followed by a second prayer and the benediction. After this, the minister takes his seat beneath the pulpit, and the function concludes with another hymn. This is the moment for the rite of baptism. It is very short and simple. The godmother carries in the babe, covered with a silken cloth, and hands it to the godfather who vows to give the child religious instruction. Then the parson sprinkles and blesses it. The women leave the church at once, but the men remain seated until the minister has passed out.

At this haymaking time of year, the congregation chiefly consisted of black-capped, weather-beaten matrons. But one old dame, evidently a person of importance, since she shared a pew with the pastor's wife, sported a picturesque costume of dark blue cloth with full sleeves, and had a curiously embroidered cap perched on the crown of the head. By the way, the Soglio church has only three pews, two at the women's end, and one for the authorities higher up. Benches without backs accomodate the rest of the

people. The village girls are not beautiful, their features being as hard as their singing; but they are cleanly, robust, and their well-brushed hair is strained back from shining, sensible foreheads. They are a practical race, and, notwithstanding their nearness to Italy, thoroughly Swiss, and devoid of charm. In the deserted state of the village, we saw few of its male inhabitants, but competent authorities declare them to be sober, industrious, thriving and full of intelligent interest in the world's affairs. Their spiritual life is said to be limited to a cold and stoical formalism. For instance, visitation of the sick, is not included among the pastor's duties, although the number of services, Bible lessons, etc., required in return for his emoluments, are all strictly prescribed in black and white. Bodily suffering seems to stir little compassion at Soglio. Day after day, a pale man, with his arm in a sling, sat at his own door smoking endless pipes, and all night long there was a light in his window. His arm hurt most at night, he said, and for six long weeks he hadn't been able to undress. Yet

he bore his torture with stoical calm ; no one seemed to do anything to relieve him, and when we asked how he felt, he only complained that it was hard to have to pay labourers to do his work, and send his wife up the mountain to cut the hay.

Another neighbour excited pity at first. For a week we beheld him, immovable as a statue, framed in the top casement of the other De Salis house, his venerable white head bent over a book, his shoulders covered by a dingy white shirt. The poor old fellow was certainly paralysed, and we longed to know what literature absorbed him. But when Sunday came, there was our invalid on his feet, with a coat on, leaning out of the window, shouting to friends beneath, and the next morning we saw him tramping stoutly down the lane with a scythe on his back. He owned the big ill-kept mansion he lived in, and was said to be the richest man in the village. One cannot suppose he wasted much coin in amusement. The diversions of Soglio seemed to consist—for the males—in moderate drinking at the bar of the hotel ; for

the women folk, in subdued conversations on door-steps. I doubt whether even a Punch and Judy show could rouse these villagers to mirth. Are they still languid after their one burst of energy in 1552, or did wicked Priest Ulrich cast a spell on them when hurled to his death? Rather, perhaps summer is too short to melt the winter ice in their veins, and certainly all must have a slow time of it in this very dull hamlet. After the cows and goats have clattered off up the mountain at early dawn, nothing happens, nothing stirs, until cows and goats come down again at night and troop with much pattering of hoofs and jingling of bells to drink their sleeping draught at the fountain.

But although benumbed on the surface, these people are not ungentle at heart. One evening, as I tramped alone down a mountain track, a grimy, brutal looking man suddenly rushed on me from the door of a hut with extended hand. It was startling, but the apparition only came to give me a bunch of edelweiss with a kindly grunt, and then slipped off in the

darkness without expecting any reward. So these Soglio folk are Swiss with a difference after all, and confirm Mr. Symons' view of the characteristics of the Graubunden people in general.

III.

As before said, Soglio stands on a shelf; so after much climbing to pinewoods and "Alps" above, down to chestnut glades below, much fording of torrents and threading of ravines at either end of the shelf, a yearning for level ground removed us to Promontogno. This is a charming village of broad-caved, balconied houses wedged into a nook where the mountains draw together across the valley, barely leaving room for the river to thrust its way between them. And though only a suburb of Bondo, thriving Promontogno has already outgrown the parent township. Constant flights of travellers to and from the Engadine keep it on the alert, and the hotel is always lading and unlading fresh cargoes of guests.

After the stillness of Soglio this bustle is refresh-

ing ; the rush of the Maira pours new life into one's veins by day and soothes one to rest at night ; and one appreciates every detail of the enchanting landscape only seen in bird's eye view from Soglio. Besides, from that eyrie we had only a bowing acquaintance with the Bondasca glacier, soaring so grandly above its bulwarks of cliff and forest. Here we are close to the mouth of the gorge, and the milk-white torrent born in its ice cave tears down to the Maira just under the roses of the hotel garden. The pleasant valley winds away southwards framed in chestnut woods and larches and firs to the blue peaks of the Valtelline. In the foreground, at a turn of the stream, a double line of walnuts strides across the meads from a high-peaked bridge to the De Salis manor house. Just behind this stately block the brown roofs of Bondo lie nestled at the foot of the mountain. This little town is an interesting anomaly in more ways than one. Its crooked lanes, branching from a central square and ending suddenly in larch woods and pastures, are lined by dwellings that, with

a few exceptions, have no nearer relation with architecture than have early Christian drawings with Renaissance art. Yet the commune is so rich that not only has it no paupers, but gives to all born within its bounds a yearly grant for life of flour, rice, and fuel. The latter must be a welcome gift, since during three or four winter months no sunbeam touches this shadowed nook. Yet in summer Bondo has a delicious climate, its gardens are ablaze with roses and more delicate flowers, while rhododendrons and other Alpine plants flourish at the roots of the last stragglers from the great army of chestnuts.

It is amusing to find the mean alleys of Bondo distinguished by high-sounding names daubed in irregular characters, and interesting to mark the inscriptions on most of the houses, marking in Grisons' style, the date of their erection, and recommending their inmates to the protection of God. For instance—"Colui che rege da ponente a levante—voglia benedire questa casa et li abitanti—Picinon."

(May He that rules from west to east bless this house and the dwellers therein.)

Again, over the door of one wordly-wise citizen, we read :

D.O.M. 1602.

"Chi sprezza il suo prossimo è privo di senno
Ma l'uomo prudente se ne tace.

Rod. et Anna Cat. Scartazzini A-no 1824."

(He that scorns his neighbour is a fool ;
Prudent folk keep their own counsel.)

The Piazza de' Consigli in the centre of the town is bordered by quaint old houses including a steep roofed, deep-browed manse with every casement and balcony filled with flowers. The church tower at one corner composes well with a clump of elder trees, and a shadowy lane opposite frames a scrap of sunlit valley.

But the lion of Bondo is the De Salis house, dating from the middle of the last century, and no less interesting in its way than the older mansion at Soglio.

This one was begun by Count Jerome de Salis and

his English bride, and completed by their son Count Peter, Governor of the Valtelline. It is grandly designed and its entrance hall and vast double staircase are suited to a palace. A great Venetian chandelier hangs from the lofty ceiling and its delicate blues and pinks are repeated in the stucco mouldings of the walls. The same cheerful scheme of colour prevails in several rooms, while others are sombrely wainscotted and panelled. Part of the more valuable furniture has been removed, but there are still some good carved pieces, ancient coffers and cabinets. There is a blue room gloomily splendid with stamped velvet hangings, and a colossal four-poster, that must surely be haunted with nightmares at least ; and there is an exquisite chamber with a most fanciful bed and plentiful draperies of soft, rich apple-green silk. No fear of cold in this dainty room, for a huge German stove rises to the roof, faced with landscapes and hunting scenes on grey and white tiles. In the dressing closet beyond hang portraits of two startlingly hideous old women, notorious witches who were put

to death at the stake, less than two centuries ago, a few miles down the valley. It was a relief to turn from their terrible faces to that of a serene and stately dame in the old Grisons' costume of embroidered bodice and furred cap.

The house is thronged with family portraits of many generations, knights, courtiers, cavaliers, judges and ecclesiastics. Fair ladies, too, and children of the race : notably one charming little maid in stiff brocade, clutching a carnation in her baby grasp. Part of the collection has been recently brought over from England, and here, beside some excellent pieces of the Sir Joshua school, is a portrait of that fine old cavalry officer, Lieut.-General Rudolph de Salis, who died in 1880.

The library on the top floor, fairly stocked with standard works in French and English, contains a tempting array of family archives, and a small room behind is filled with weapons and armour of various periods, probably gathered together from earlier De Salis' homes in Bregaglia. One monstrous two-

handed sword with a wavy blade, and three daggers in its hilt, could have only been used by giant hands, and may have belonged to that mediæval colossus, Dictigen de Salis, nick-named Sampson, in honour of his feats. The carved cradle near this sword may have also been his, for it is ponderous and strong enough to withstand the kicks of an infant Hercules.

The incongruities of this luxurious mountain home, its cosmopolitan touches, its jumble of old and new, appeal strongly to the imagination. Heredity should play odd freaks in so mixed a line, and one scans the family portraits with much curiosity as to the histories of those who sat for them. Yet these yards of painted canvas and files of yellow papers in the library seem to be all that is left of generations of active brains and eager hearts. "Vanity of vanities."

But there is nothing grim about this deserted house. It is habitable and friendly as well as fascinating. Seated in that lovely valley with

glorious mountains all around, with spacious rooms and bowered garden, it would be an ideal summer home, and as we strolled down the walnut avenue to the river, we envied its far away owner.

Now at last, the Bondasca glacier was within walking distance, and the beauty of the gorge surpassed expectation. A stiff climb behind the rock cellars of Promontogno, near the shooting huts, brought us to the brink of the cleft, through which the glacier-torrent forces its way. The cliffs almost meet over the shadowy depth where hurrying waters foam in wonderful blue-green and black caves.

The firs close about us as we follow the track higher and higher, and always at the edge of the precipice, but soon the gorge widens a little, and we see women cutting grass on a perilous slope across the stream. Our path turns through forest glades, where strawberries gleam like rubies in the sun about moss-cushioned boulders, and then dips towards the bed of the torrent, amid masses of frozen snow and

débris, the remains of an old avalanche. A broad wedge of snapped fir-trunks on the opposite mountain marks the course of this snow-fall. The ravine broadens now ; there is a strip of pasture land across the water, and the first fork of the glacier appears high above, dotted with patches of pink snow or ice. Ahead of us all passage seems barred by a huge bank of moraine, but this obstacle turned, we enter an amphitheatre of meadow and woodland, and another sharp ascent brings us to the head of the valley. The path ends at a cluster of huts, and straight before us, across the stream, rises the grand ice field of the Bondasca above a tall pebble slope. It is crowned by a dome of purest snow, and clasped by the peaks of Piz Badil, and a host of lesser pinnacles and horns. A deep blue *crêvasse* runs down its face, figuring a monstrous human profile framed in jagged waves of ice, and higher up, over flanking caverns of sapphire, lies another patch of rose-coloured snow. The glacier is split into two unequal parts by a barrier of bristling crags, some

bearing the shape of craning, open-beaked birds, others of men with diademed heads and trailing robes. One of these royal figures seems to our sun-dazzled eyes to be swaying to and fro, bending invitingly towards us with waving arms. It was a fascinating illusion. For a second or so it was as though we had surprised the giants of the ice world at play. And even when the glamour passed and the *dramatis personæ* stood petrified on their huge stage, the real scene was sufficient delight.

From our resting place on the turf by a baby torrent we traced out what seemed a quick and easy course to the glacier, coasting round this cul de sac to the great stone slope at its base. But the sun was already low, and on consulting the haymakers we learnt that it was a two hours' climb to the ice. So we contented ourselves with exploring the little settlement of stout balconied chalets and rough cabins, drank goats' milk from big wooden bowls and chatted with our entertainers. These good Bondo folk spend two or three weeks here cutting and

storing their hay, and their life seemed idyllic in this Alpine glen, face to face with the frozen mystery of the glacier.

Why does no enterprising soul set the fashion of camping out here and show us how to enjoy the freedom of the mountains without the crowd and din of mountain hotels? This would be a perfect place for the attempt. Marketing could be done at Pro-montogno, and tents, cooking stoves, blankets and books easily carried up on mule back. Strong-limbed people could explore ice-caves, scale peaks and mount difficult passes, while weaker ones collected flowers, strolled in the scented shade of the pinewoods, and gained strength from the crisp, pure air. What festive evenings such a party might spend gathered about a blazing fire under the stars, and with violin or guitar and youthful songs, and earnest talk on all things in earth and heaven! The glen is five thousand feet above the sea, is sheltered from north winds; the breath of the ice fields would temper the heat of the hottest days, and in bad weather one could find refuge in the huts.

Above Promontogno, on the lofty spur barricading the valley, stand the ruins of Castlemur, once a formidable stronghold and still imposing in decay. Its broken walls stride down to the river ; and its great brown keep dominates all Bregaglia. In the shadow of this keep is a charming little church—formerly the mother-church of the valley—with the big bell that was only used to sound the alarm when foes were at hand, or to ring the knell of a De Salis. Now, of course, it is a Protestant temple, and belongs to the Castlemur family, by whom it has been tastefully restored. Near it is a miniature castle built by the present Baroness, and the dainty wainscotted chambers of this toy fortress command lovely views down the valley.

Once beyond the Porta, where the road to the Engadine is tunnelled through the rock of Castlemur, we are in an Alpine world, and Italian luxuriance might be a hundred miles off, instead of only behind the barrier just passed.

Pines and larches shade the road, and arrested cataracts of boulders threaten its safety. Numerous hamlets dot the fields across the Maira, and that

frisky stream races in a series of rapids round the base of a crag-like island, crowned by the church of San Pietro.

Farther on, at Coltura, the red front of Villa Castle-mur makes a glowing patch of colour by the river side, while behind, above climbing fir woods, the black peaks and snowy horn of Piz Duana rise into prominence. One clatters through Stampa and Borgonuovo, where frescoed walls and scutchconed doors give historic dignity to rustic streets, and soon come to Vicosoprano, the capital of the valley. It is a cheerful little town with some ancient towers, picturesque houses, and the usual pious inscriptions. Good accommodation may be had here ; it is a convenient centre for excursions to the famous Albigna glacier and cascade, while the pines streaming down into the valley and bordering road and river for miles, offer pleasant woodland rambles to those unfit for mountain work.

An hour's drive brings one to Casaccia, the last and highest village of Bregaglia. It is an untidy,

straggling place, and no grand peaks are in view, but the air is bracing without being rough. Woods, water and side glens give variety to the landscape ; the Septimer Pass lies up the gorge behind, and the Maloja may be reached on foot in less than two hours.

Just behind the interesting Gothic ruin of St. Gaudenzio, the earliest Christian church in the valley, the road winds through a forest of magnificent pines, and the precipice above is a hanging garden of Alpine flowers and greenery. The Flora of the mountains in fleeing the ice-blasts of the Engadine has fallen headlong over these sun-kissed rocks, and draped them lavishly with its best treasures.

As we zigzag slowly up the pass more and more snow peaks rear their heads. The flashing splendour of the Orlegna Cascade is ample consolation for the loss of Albigna. We are near the summit now ; the horses halt to take breath, and we turn to gaze on the summer world left behind, where amethystine Italian peaks and soft, green crests lean against the sky.

Then forward, the last ascent is won ; horse bells jingle faster, and behold, before us a circle of snowy mountains, a chaos of crags, black and grey. Innumerable white peaks crop up on all sides, such mere molehills apparently that it is strange to hear their lofty titles rolled out. Surely this is the giant land at the top of Jack's Beanstalk !

Here is the old Maloja inn, a grim and rambling barrack, and there, to the left, is the entrance to the Janus-faced building, that shows a fiercely turretted front to Bregaglia, but on this side is a peaceful modern chalet. Here is the much-balconied Osteria Vecchia, gay with multi-coloured inscriptions in Gothic letters, and various smaller hotels are scattered about on the sere marsh turf. There, before us gleams the blue stretch of the Silser See, and near its brink stands the huge Grand Hotel, with wide-spreading wings of bazars, stables and workshops. It is a bulkier edition of our "Great Western" caravansery, and might be the terminus of a Polar line. For even on this brilliant August day, the landscape is a truly

Arctic desolation. One seems to be at the edge of the world, and as though the bleak summits girdling us about had their roots in chaos. At this elevation, some of the highest peaks of the Engadine are dwarfed. We have surprised the mountains at home, in undress, as it were, but the sternness of the scene has a fascination of its own.

All austerity vanishes on the steps of the Grand Hotel. We might be in Paris or Nice to judge by the elegance of the crowd pouring in and out through those great glass doors, and the decorativeness of the interior. It is a modern Aladdin's palace, fitted with every contrivance for pleasure and utility, including a splendid dancing hall and an excellent orchestra.

Many people evidently like to live with a brass band that can be turned on at will, as you turn on hot air or electric light in the bedrooms.

This Maloja hostelry is a triumph of *fin de siècle* civilization, and has, therefore, the drawbacks of arti-

ficial life. All is luxury, convenience, and, so to say, vulgar refinement, but for our own part we prefer the solitude of Soglio. There, at least, we have no brass band !

CHAPTER IV.

ASOLO AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD.

I.

THE turrets of Vicenza, and the fine group of mountains behind, were glowing with sunset fires as we steamed across the plain. We had caught the perfect Italian landscape at its most magical moment; a rush through sculptured streets had shown us a pageant in brick and stone; palaces, piazzas and churches, mediæval towers and the Renaissance phantasies of Palladio's theatre. So now the rapidly fading twilight was grateful alike to eyes and brain, and served to confirm our possession of the wonders just seen.

Night had fallen before the train dropped us at Castelfranco. One could barely distinguish the

gate of the inner town, surmounted by the lion of St. Mark, once Treviso's best defence against Paduan raids, but now chiefly famed as the shrine of Giorgione's great altar-piece. The painter's statue amongst the trees on the bastion was only a faint white patch in the darkness, and soon, the lamps of his birthplace left behind we were jingling along a straight road, between perpetual acacias and Indian corn, only interrupted by numerous cross-ways, one or two hamlets and villas, and here and there a group of dark figures taking their rest after the day's work by squatting sociably in a circle in the dust. On and on, but at last the horses' paces slackened. We were mounting a hill, lights twinkled high about us ; rocks, instead of hedges, bordered the road ; there was a sound of fast-running water. Higher and higher between over-arching trees. Suddenly these part, the carriage stops, loved voices shout welcome, we are at Casa Bolzon, at the gates of Asolo !

This towered city on a foothill of the Alps, overhanging the vast Trevisan plain, has a special claim

on English hearts as the abode of Robert Browning during the last summer of his life. He had known and loved it from his youth, for on his first Italian journey—straight by sea from London to Venice—he had crossed the plain on foot, to visit the home of Caterina Cornaro, and impressed by the charm of the place, chose it for the scene of “Pippa Passes.” Though giving little definite description, save in Ottilia’s lines:—

“ Ah the clear morning ! I can see St. Marks !
That black streak is the Belfry. Stop : Vicenza
Should lie. . . . There’s Padua plain enough, that blue ! ”

one feels that the poet was inspired by the life and landscape of Asolo, its dawns and sunsets, its “crescent moon” rising over the Trevisan plain. Does he not tell us in “Asolando”?—

“ How many a year my Asolo,
Since—one step just from sea to land—
I found you, loved, yet feared you so—
For natural objects seemed to stand
Palpably fire-clothed ! ”

The “one step just” is, however, a long stride even by day, with the castle-crowned height as a beacon to

cheer one across the level and up the wooded ascent of Foresto della Casella. Asolo climbs two hills, and here to the south, crowning the higher of the twain, stands the rugged shell, brown and windowless, of its ancient Rocca a stronghold dating from Euganean days. Below, a space of turf and broken ground, vines, oleanders and roses stream down to the terraced villas overhanging the road, while far beneath, the vast plain stretches away to the sea, its greenery transfused with the lovely blue haze peculiar to the south. Innumerable villages and towns are dotted about on the azure space, the sun strikes here and there on tall white church or tower, a streak of mist simulates an inland sea, the silhouettes of Venetian and Paduan belfries cut the horizon, and the Euganean hills are shadowy cones in the middle distance beyond San Zenone, that blood-stained fortress whercin tyrant Eccelino paid the penalty of his crimes. Beyond Montebelluno, to the left, lies Vicenza ; Bassano over there to the right, at the lowest step of the mountain chain that curves so grandly round behind Asolo.

Entering the town by a line of common-place houses, we soon come to a massive corner palace in the Renaissance style, pierced by a broad archway, serving as a frame to oleanders and sky. Then, by the windings of an arcaded street, past frescoed fronts and pointed Venetian windows, to the chief piazza and centre of the town. There, beyond the porticoed flank of the Duomo, is the flight of steps down which Pippa must have passed to the house of the Bishop's brother, whence one has a fine outlook over the plain between cascades of brown roofs and turrets. On the opposite side of the piazza is a great stone fountain capped by a very grotesque and top-heavy lion, and behind this another square slopes steeply up to grey-walled gardens and a huge, many-windowed palace. Here oxen rest beneath rows of horse-chestnuts, and if it be market day, the ground is covered with piles of quaint crockery, ironware, baskets, ribbons, handkerchiefs, rolls of homespun and cotton stuffs, mountains of fruit and vegetables, and crates of unhappy fowls. Here, too,

the "upper ten" of Asolo may be seen driving hard bargains shoulder to shoulder with the peasantry, and young beaux, puffing long cigars, stroll about scanning the feminine charms hidden under fashionable hats or prettily framed in rustic handkerchiefs. On the lower piazza, where the Town Hall, frescoed with faded battle-scenes and encrusted with the arms of ancient Podestás, flanks the church steps, the main street expands into a dignified approach to the royal palace, planted on the summit of the cliff at the edge of the town. How many gay cavalcades must have clattered over these stones in the days of Queen Catherine, and what festive throngs poured through these arcades to greet Her Majesty's passage!

The tall, square keep of the Cornaro Castle, at the turn of the steep causeway, commands a long, narrow cross-street, diving down to another gate, and lined by many massive dwellings. For Asolo is bigger than it seems, contains nearly six thousand inhabitants, and has ranked as a city since the year 1741.

Of the once spacious castle little now survives save

the keep, and part of the building containing the Queen's reception room. The former serves as a prison, but its cells are actually untenanted. Caterina's hall is converted into a theatre, and as rehearsals were going on, admission was denied at the time of our visit. But through the custodian's vineyard we gained a ruined turret, and revelled in the view, with an operatic chorus for an accompaniment. Immediately below us lay an irregular space of turf, backed by ruined Cornaro walls, ending in a lower tower connected by a vine trellis with an unfinished house at the farthest edge of the enclosure. This was Robert Browning's favourite haunt, and just before his death he was intending to buy the skeleton building, in order to convert it into a summer retreat. In memory of his father's love for the place, Mr. Barrett Browning has completed the purchase, and being bound to leave the Cornaro walls intact, proposes to carry a road round their base, to render the villa accessible from the street below. It is an ideal spot for a poet's home.

Each day at Asolo developed some fresh fascination, every hour some special charm. Besides enchanting surprises of hill and dale, of cypress-fringed mounts, trickling streams, and grand effects on the peaks above, an endless drama of light and colour was always being played on the plain. Wonderful processions of clouds swept through the sky ; sometimes a distant hailstorm was seen transformed into a rain of fire, as the sun suddenly broke forth, or huge trails of mist flew like spectres before gusts of mountain wind. No wonder so many painters come to Asolo ! One sees pictures at every turn : groups of country-folk ; tricks of sunlight down precipitous lanes ; radiant scraps of landscape seen through tunnels of blackened stone ; mediæval casements draped with sprays of starry jessamine ; gleams of colour in cavernous dens beneath the arcades—everywhere subjects for the brush ! An English artist owns the prettiest house in Asolo, on the site of the Roman theatre. Wandering among his roses and vines one comes on fallen columns and fragments of sculpture,

and a long grass walk between over-arching trees leads to a cool bower, looking forth over the plain. But, of course, the grandest view of all is from the summit of the hill by the old Rocca. Here, too, are the remains of a Roman aqueduct, and a line of crumbling fortifications fringes the crest and dips into the valley behind.

The Asolo Museum contains some interesting relics of Caterina Cornaro : her escutcheon, her last will and testament, etc., etc. As all know, the "Sovereign Lady of Asolo" was the niece and adopted daughter of the Venetian Senator, Marco Cornaro, and wife of James II. of Lusignan, fifteenth king of Cyprus. Widowed in 1473, and bereaved of her baby son the following year, she remained nominally Queen of the island until 1488. Then, yielding to pressure, she reluctantly resigned her shadowy power to the firmer grasp of the Republic, and receiving Asolo in exchange, ruled there to her death in 1510. Her full title, as set forth in her signature, was :

"Regina Catherina, aut Catherina Cornelia, de

Lusignano Veneta Dei grat. Hier. Cypri et Armeniae Regina ac Domina Asili."

A long letter signed in her terribly illegible hand is also preserved here, and doubtless many other documents will some day be disinterred. At present the archives are in a state of chaos, and waiting, together with the store of Roman and Euganean antiquities, for skilled hands and eyes to reduce them to order. There is an ill-painted picture of the Queen in widow's weeds that must be the basest of caricatures, unless Titian's famous portrait was wholly ideal. For it shows us a snub-nosed, swarthy little person, as undignified as she is plain. Another representation of her may be seen in the Accademia at Venice, in the crowned figure kneeling by the canal in Gentile Bellini's "Miracolo della Croce."

Caterina proved a beneficent sovereign to Asolo, and although she would have preferred to exchange her microscopic dominions for the hand of a Neapolitan prince, made the best of her position by gathering about her a brilliant court. Cardinal Bembo was one

of the most devoted of her train, and has celebrated the delights of her realm in his tedious, stilted "Asolani." But in 1509 the pleasant little court was scattered by alarms of war, and Caterina fled before the advance of the Imperial forces. Her town was invaded, her palace partially sacked, and although these first assailants were speedily expelled by the Venetians, the place was occupied by Emperor Maximilian the following year, and only restored to the Republic in 1514, for the Lady of Asolo did not live to resume her sway.

Dying in Venice in 1510, she was buried with all the honours of royalty in the Santi Apostoli Church. Then, in 1660, her remains were exhumed, and transferred to their present resting-place in S. Salvatore.

The three lions of Asolo—Caterina Cornaro, Canova, and Browning—are strangely jumbled together in the Museum, and though it is easy to find a connecting link between the sixteenth-century Queen and the nineteenth-century poet who has pierced to the inner life of old Italy, the soulless symmetry of

the sculptor's "Paris" seems entirely out of place there.

Just now Asolo seems proudest of our poet. His photograph hangs in a place of honour, one of his manuscripts is enshrined in a glass case, and the house in which he stayed bears this inscription :

" Qui abitò Roberto Browning
il sommo poeta inglese
e qui scrisse *Asolando*."

This house is in the arcaded street between the south gate and the Piazza, and a steep, gloomy staircase leads to the poet's quarters, consisting of two cosy bedrooms, and a tiny salon beyond, up two or three more steps. Evidently the radiance of his mental vision must have made him indifferent to sunshine and prospect, for the windows command nothing but a blank brown wall across the narrow thoroughfare. Such noisy rooms, too, echoing with footsteps and voices from the arcade underneath, and inconveniently near to clanging church bells ! But the landlady, a pleasant little woman named Nina Tabacchi, declared

that Mr. Browning was not disturbed by these sounds *after the first five nights*, and generally remained indoors writing until four o'clock in the afternoon. Then he went out for a walk, visited his friends, and attended every performance at the "Teatro Sociale" in the Cornaro Castle.

She treasures the inkstand and pens—steel and quill—used by her tenant, although she might have sold them over and over again, together with a cracked washing-basin for which she has been offered fabulous sums. But she is unwilling to part with these relics, as her rooms are in great request with pilgrims to the shrine. Many old English ladies, she said, came to Asolo expressly to enjoy the privilege of sleeping in Mr. Browning's bed!

So Asolo is ahead of Florence, for no inscription in his honour has been added to his wife's memorial tablet on Casa Guidi, where he lived so long, wrote "Men and Women," and conceived "The Ring and the Book." It chanced that just before his death Florence had felt obliged to check the craze for dis-

tinguishing the abodes of very small fry, by decreeing that no man, however great, should be granted a tablet until twenty years deceased. Nevertheless, a longer term having passed since our poet was driven from Florence by the loss of his wife, an exception, one would think, might be made in his favour.

II.

When tired of straining the imagination in the effort to evoke Caterina's vanished court, it is good to drive down the Cornuda road to Villa Maser, where eyesight alone is needed to realise the splendours of Renaissance life.

Towards the year 1564, the Venetian Senator, Marc Antonio Barbaro, and his brother Daniele, Patriarch of Aquileia, fixed on Maser as a pleasant resting-place from cares of Church and State, and proceeded to erect a hill-side dwelling suited to the grandeur of their tastes. They summoned Palladio to design the building, Vittoria to decorate it with dainty mouldings, and Paolo Veronese to people walls and ceilings with all the gods of Olympus.

The result is an Ionic temple, backed by woods rising gently from the plain. It is approached by a stiff stone avenue of statues, balustrades, sculptured flowers and fountains dividing trim squares of vines and turf, and flanked on either side by a portico, ending in a circular pavilion. On a summer day the general effect is almost as dazzling as that of a quarry or chalk pit, and the tropical foliage of palms and bamboos by the doorway only intensify the impression of heat. A big, white fountain faces the entrance in the white road below, and a little farther on stands a white church in the likeness of a Roman temple, formerly the Barbaro Chapel. The view from Maser is inferior to that from Asolo. The same luxuriant plain stretches before us, but we are too near its level to appreciate its charms, and a scrubby, flat-faced ridge to the left blocks out the undulating land in the direction of Belluno. But doubtless the builders of this Renaissance house were quite satisfied with the prospect. With the towers of Venice faintly visible on the horizon, what more could be desired? They were

in the country, yet all vulgar details of country life were masked by trim ranges of arcades.

We know that Marc Antonio's fingers sought relief from penning official papers in modelling some of the adornments of his monumental avenue, and probably the rockwork grotto and fountain behind the house satisfied any craving for the romantic in his highly-cultured soul. Given the artificial tastes of Renaissance grandees, Maser must have proved an ideal retreat. And, as a shrine of art, it is worth a pilgrimage from any part of Europe, much less from neighbouring Asolo. Lovers of Venetian painting owe gratitude to the magnificent amateur who called Veronese to enrich his walls with those splendid frescoes. The master plied his task *con amore*, and inspired perhaps by the wide horizon and rural landscape, has introduced open-air effects into his mythological scenes, and treated his divinities in a light-hearted manner, as if they too had fled the constraints of court life, and were taking their ease in the country.

The interior of this Palladian temple is ingeniously adapted to the needs of Venetian domesticity. It is in the shape of a cross, its length forming a *sala* running from back to front, just as in a palace on the Grand Canal. The sole decorations here are allegorical figures *en grisaille*, placed in false niches and surrounded by frescoed trophies of arms. The vault of the central cupola is peopled with colossal divinities, Jupiter, Apollo, Venus, &c., all in unconventional, un-studied attitudes. Bencath, arranged over and against a frieze or balustrade, are some charming figures; a fair girl, a boy with one of the painter's favourite hounds, a page reading, a monkey, parrot and child. But best of all are the frescoes in the side rooms. Here Pagan goddesses face Virgins and Saints, and Bacchus peeps forth beside Venetian dames through a trellis of grape-laden vines. In the daintiest of these chambers, above a carved mantel-piece—too huge for the room one ventures to think—there is a group of musicians so living and fresh that one almost hopes to hear the sound of their lutes. Veronese has turned

every inch of space to account, seemingly bent on leaving no corner unfilled, and surprising his patrons by delicate freaks of fancy. One can imagine him quitting his work to greet the Barbaro brothers just arrived from Venice, and guiding them through a litter of paint-pots and plaster to inspect his newest achievements, while his pupils ceased from grinding colours or preparing surfaces to hear their master praised. Then would come supper, enlivened by much art talk and the latest news from the capital, and a stroll on the hillside in the summer dusk when fire-flies were flashing over the fields and a breath of sea air drifting across the plain.*

Another lovely drive leads to Possagno, Canova's birthplace, at the foot of Monte Grappa; and although the progress of art has lessened this sculptor's renown, it is interesting to find so many of his works in the gallery annexed to his abode. Also, noting the power and individuality of his portrait busts, it seems amazing

* For a detailed account of the Maser frescoes, *vide* Yriarte's "Un Patricien de Venise."

that his talent should shrink to mere Academic prettiness in all imaginative designs. He proved his love for his native village by building a church there at his own expense on the model of the Pantheon. But dying in Venice in 1822 three years after laying the first stone, he missed the joy of seeing it completed. The labour of love was carried on by his brother, according to the terms of his will, and consecrated in 1830. Canova's remains were then brought to Possagno and buried in the Rotonda opposite his famous *Pieta*. The building is a fine thing of its kind, a great white temple against the mountain side, at the head of an imposing flight of steps, and faced by a huge portico, supported on sixteen Doric columns of native marble. We had the luck to see it on a festival day, a musical Mass was in course of performance, the vast area of the church was thronged, and many worshippers had overflowed among the shafts of the atrium. Presently, as the last organ notes pealed, a most picturesque crowd poured forth into the sunlight, streaming down the steps in cascades of colour. Women

and children in bright-hued kerchiefs and flowing white veils, men—mostly tall, comely fellows—in brown or olive fustian and brilliant red and blue ties. To the left of the church a rocky path winds between cypresses and shrines to a Calvary chapel perched aloft. It is an exciting side scene, wild and Alpine, in strange contrast with the classic centre-piece of glittering white temple and pompous approach. There, a suggestion of primitive, old-world faith ; here, all the pride and splendour of Papal Rome.

CHAPTER V.

SAN MARINO.

IT was from the pier at Rimini that we had our first view of San Marino one bright September afternoon. Rushing by rail across the plain the evening before, we had sought it in vain amid the twilight throng of the Umbrian peaks. Now its crisp outline, its triplet of towers, awoke an old longing to visit the oldest republic in the world.

Next to the wonderful church where Renaissance fancy runs riot on the way to Barocco frenzy, where love songs are wrought in marbles of daintiest device, and lust and vainglory blazoned on wall and arch—the church, nominally dedicated to meek St. Francis, but practically to its fierce renovator, Sigismondo Malatesta, whose mistress is here glorified as a saint, while

his murdered wives are thrust away in a corner—next to this, the most striking thing at Rimini is the view from the pier. You look beyond the flamingo and orange sails massed in the port and hiding the grand curve of the Roman bridge, across a stretch of vines and orchards, to purpling hills backed by a wild confusion of jagged and broken summits. You think of the tangled history which Mr. Symonds has so happily entitled "The Age of the Despots," and feel that the scene before you would be an admirable frontispiece to its pages. For these fantastic precipices are a fitting background to the turbulent men of war born in their clefts, and who filled Italian chronicles with their strife. Just as among the Tuscan Apennines the dominant form of twin peaks seems emblematic of the more sober and balanced Tuscan mind, so these abrupt cloven cliffs of Umbria—cloven as by some giant's war-axe—and the ever-recurring forms of rugged promontories and thrusting beaks, may well symbolise the bold, lawless, striving, pushing race, warlike and cruel, strong, subtle, and sensual, of

which the tyrant of Rimini was so notable a type. And on the edge of this grim region San Marino has so commanding a position that you marvel how it contrived to retain its freedom through ages of border broils. For even with the powerful friendship of the lords of Urbino it is strange that the tiny republic should have escaped Malatesta's grasp, when the still steeper stronghold of San Leo so often changed hands, and was tossed like a ball from one chieftain to another. No wonder that the pious citizens of San Marino should have ascribed their safety to the miraculous protection of their patron saint!

Few spots in overrun Italy are less hackneyed than this toy republic. With neither paintings nor sculptures to entice the art pilgrim, and twelve miles and more from the nearest railway station, its rock is seldom scaled by ordinary tourists. Yet, if only as a political curiosity, this "*échantillon de république*," as Napoleon called it, is well worth seeing, while its position as a sort of inland Capri is as imposing as that of Orvieto.

So we started from Rimini one bright September morning, almost in the mood of explorers, in a pleasant stir of excited expectancy. The plain crossed, the road winds up hill and down dale to the little torrent that is the frontier line between kingdom and republic. Soon we came to Serravalle, a straggling village with a picturesque tower, and here a pair of white oxen were brought out to pull us up the rough road. Little ravines sparsely set with oaks and birches, and rolling grey hills, newly wrinkled by the plough, replaced the rich greenery of the plain. The spiked blue thistle appeared by the roadside gleaming like sword blades in the sun. The limestone crags of San Marino towered ahead, a natural fortress, and there were peeps of the mountain waste behind. To our right was a series of castle-crowned hills—pretty Verucchio, the nest of the Malatesta brood ; the fierce cliffs of Scorticata and a chain of lower eminences set with prim rows of mulberries. Convents and hamlets and sentinel cypresses break the monotony of the level to the left, and beyond it a faintly tinted sky-line of

mountain-ridge sweeps up from the Pesaro headland to the range behind Urbino. We follow our white road to a mass of brown roofs at the base of Monte Titano. This is Borgo, the commercial capital of San Marino. Here we are told that we must eat, since in the upper town no refreshment is to be obtained for man or beast. We naturally decline to postpone the chief interest of the day until after lunch, so the smiling landlady of the Albergo Michetti consents to send our meal to the top of the rock, and we joyfully continue our drive. The road winds round to the southern face of the crag, and we look across torient-seamed gullies to the bristling cliffs and precipices of Montefeltro and Carpegna. At every step the view grows stranger and weirder. On this side, San Marino is seen to be a town in many stories, and its terraced gardens and *loggia* stretch half-way down into the valley. A bottle-nosed citizen has attached himself to our party as guide, is useful in teaching us the names of the mountains, and proves to be well-informed about his city and its sights. His statements tally pretty

exactly with those of printed authorities, and may be given here for the benefit of readers unacquainted with Mr. Bent's complete history of San Marino.

The whole territory of the state consists of sixteen square miles, and has a population of about nine thousand souls. The capital city, inclusive of the Borgo at its foot, has over nine hundred inhabitants. The army is composed of ten companies of ninety men each; but perhaps our guide forgot to reckon the reserve, for Mr. Bent says that the military force is two thousand strong, and that half the able-bodied men of every family must be enrolled between the ages of sixteen and fifty-five, unless they are Government officers, doctors, priests, or students. The entire revenue of the State is less than £5,000 a year, but San Marino is a model of financial prudence, has no public debt, lives within its income, and has even a nest-egg laid by against rainy days. And although it bestows no titles on its own subjects, it swells its exchequer by the sale of orders and titles of nobility to foreigners. To avoid complications with Italy, it has

no printing press within its dominions. For the same reason it refrains from growing tobacco, and buying the leaf from Italy at cost price, contents itself with manufacturing its own cigars. It possesses no penal establishments, but has made a very pleasant arrangement with its obliging neighbour. San Marino sends its criminals to be punished in Italy, and although that part of the arrangement is probably not recorded in black and white—may be said to receive monks and nuns in exchange. For the two large nunneries and four monasteries of this tiny state afford the devout uncurtailed privileges that are no longer, it seems, to be enjoyed across the border.

While chatting of these things our attention was called to an historical personage pushing a cart downhill. This was the citizen who had guided Garibaldi and his poor Anita across country during the disastrous flight from Rome in 1849. The defeated hero had led the remnant of his army to San Marino, but the republic, being threatened by Austria, could only shelter him for one night. A marble slab on the house

in which he slept, near the Franciscan gate, records this timid hospitality.

The entrance to the town is as picturesque as it is characteristic. To the right, a flight of steps leads to the brown-eaved porch of a convent church containing the only art treasure owned by the Republic, a much damaged Virgin and Saints by Giovanni Bellini ; in front and to the left, steep paved lanes wind up to the citadel and thread the shallow town. The Pianello or Piazza della Libertá is the centre of public life. It is flanked by the council halls and post-office, and opens to the south on the glorious mountain view. In the middle is an energetic statue of Liberty the gift and work of the German lady who bears the San Marino title of Duchess of Acqua Viva. Carved in stone on the wall of the post-office are the measures used in the Republics. Thus all who run may read ; citizens are taught even the regulation size of bricks and coping stones, and their wives can verify the lengths of home-spun linen bought in the market.

At this noonday hour there were few citizens to be

seen. San Marino was taking its siesta, and even the pharmacy and general gossip shop was closed. The key of the Council not being immediately procurable—presumably its keeper too was asleep—we went to the cave at the end of the rock said to have been the hermitage of the saintly founder of the town, and which is now masked by a little chapel. From the casements of the corridor behind we looked down into the arcaded streets of Borgo, across the still, green plain, and sniffed the north wind from the sea. It must have been easy here to indulge in religious ecstacy and renounce the vanities of the far-away world of men!

The legend of San Marino may be told in a few words. He was a Christian of Dalmatia, and came over with a companion named Leo to assist in the rebuilding of Rimini (then Ariminium) early in the fourth century, during the reign of Diocletian. Wearied by incessant struggle against Roman persecution, the Christian friends withdrew to this Mons Titanus, planted a cross on the summit of the rock

above their cave, carved on it the word "*Libertas*," and devoted themselves to holy exercises and meditation.

Gradually their fame spread ; miracles were ascribed to them ; believers gathered round them. The community of San Marino sprang into existence, and has remained a republic ever since. Not, however, without several narrow escapes from annexation by this or that pope or potentate ; and although originally a refuge for the devout, its rules were not monastic, San Marino, indeed, is supposed to have been a married man, and he promoted marriage among his flock. His companion had more ascetic views, and finally retired to a precipice in Montefeltro and founded the monastery which was afterwards converted into the fortress of San Leo. It was to this place that Dante likened the entrance to Purgatory, and it became famous in history as a frequent bone of contention between Montefeltro and Rimini.

It was a disappointment to find the principal church of this ancient place in the likeness of a Corinthian

temple. Cleanliness and space are its sole merits ; it glares with white marble and whitewash, and is hung with execrable daubs. Of the old twelfth-century church nothing is left but the campanile, and the present building was only finished in 1855. By narrow lanes we make our way to the castle rock of Monte Guaita. This is the grandest rock of all, and so much stone has been hewn from it on the southern side, that at one point it is connected with the town by little more than a narrow neck. Here, too, the blue thistle casts its broidery over the rocks in strange patches and patterns of metallic spikes, and might well be the emblem of this virgin republic. The citadel itself is a cheerful eyrie, so cheerful that we were startled to find it used as a prison. The cells were airy and decent rooms, with only two occupants—a handsome lad of sixteen and a boy of twelve. Both were awaiting trial ; the smooth-faced elder for stabbing a girl in a fit of jealousy, the younger one for wounding a child by accident with a loaded gun.

From the top of the belfry we had a still vaster view

over sea and land, while from the terrace of the flag-tower we looked towards Urbino and Monte Catria, and sought in vain through the sunny haze for the outline of Duke Federico's palace. Beyond the citadel, and further along the rock-screen of San Marino, stand the two other towers of Monte Cucco and Monte Gista, of which no use is made.

We had hoped to see the library of rare and precious books collected by Count Manzoni, the well-known bibliophile, but, in the absence of its owner, we could only gain admittance to his garden. It is a pleasure, in which stone walls are the principal features, flowers mere details ; but it climbs to the brink of the rock, and its terraces skirt and overhang the wonderful precipice, and are draped with ivy and ferns. Carts, oxen, and men, down in the road by Borgo, seem no bigger than flies. Cold winds blow fiercely round the corners of dark clefts, and here and there gigantic turrets and towers of limestone stand up from the buttressed slopes as though in huge mimicry of the masonry above. Retracing this giddy path to

the end near the hermitage chapel, we found a shady harbour among the rocks whence we would gaze on the faint, dark line of Ravenna's pines and the fainter coast beyond the sea, while waiting for our long-delayed lunch. This came at last, a goodly load borne on the head of the stout young waitress from Borgo, but we made short work of it, and empty dishes only had to be carried down the hill. It was wonderful how the melancholy element in the landscape disappeared after lunch! By that time the keys of the public buildings were at hand, and we hastened out into the sunshine again.

In the ante-chamber of the Hall of Justice we were faced by full-length portraits of Louis Napoleon and his wife, and a smaller one of the First Consul. Napoleon proved his friendship for the little republic by leaving it intact, and offering to extend its domains to the seaboard of Rimini. But prudence has ever been the best part of San Marino's valour, and the perilous gift was declined with thanks. In this building are kept the "properties of the republic, *etc.*

the costumes and insignia of its rulers—the Presidents, Regents, Captains, or Princes, as they seem to be indifferently styled. The official dress is austere and picturesque, and consists of a circular black silk cloak lined with blue, a black silk *juste-au-corps*, and trunk hose, a long white cravat edged with lace, and shoes and cap of black velvet, the latter being bordered with ermine. The caps of office are not worn, however, only carried by lackeys (*doucellis*) in liveries of blue and silver, with three points of silver lace on their backs to represent the three peaks or *pennine* of the republic. The equestrian order of San Marino is a handsome jewel, and is worn on a grand cordon of blue and silver ribbon. The official writing-table in the room where these objects are stored, is appropriately furnished with blue and white goose quills; but even on this conservative rock the art of cutting pens seems to be lost, for these are nibbed with steel.

The Council Hall is in the building with the deep *loggia* at the western end of the Pianello. It is a plain room of moderate size, decorated with portraits of

benefactors of the State and provided with canopied chairs on a dais behind a long table. Here we were instructed in the machinery of government, and learnt that had we deferred our visit for four days we might have witnessed the election of the new Presidents.

The method of election is an interesting survival of the intricate procedure of the old Italian Republics. The presidents or captains, one of whom is always a noble, the other a citizen or rustic, are changed every six months ; and a fortnight before their term of office expires, namely in the middle of March and September, their successors are elected by ballot. "Twelve electors are chosen by lot from the Council of Sixty, and each proposes a candidate for the presidency from among his fellow-councillors. Upon this the names of six of these, chosen by the majority of the whole council, are written upon three lots, it having been duly arranged that one noble and one of the other two estates be coupled together. These preliminaries having been completed, the whole council go in great pomp, accompanied by music and soldiery, to the

parish church, towards the evening of the day on which the election takes place, their attendants carrying torches to add to the solemnity of the scene. Here the parish priest is in attendance, and having read aloud the names on the three lots, encloses them in three ballot balls, puts them into a silver urn, shakes it well, and then, in the presence of the assembled multitude, a little boy of about eight years extracts one of the lots which contains the names of the captains elect.*

Then, every 1st of April and 1st of September the new rulers solemnly assume office and the outgoing captains vacate the seats of honour, and hand over the insignia, etc., to their successors. This, the custodian assured us, was a most touching ceremony; he had beheld foreigners, especially Frenchmen, actually moved to tears by it. The late captains have then to pass through a trying ordeal. In accordance with the old usage, they are literally

* *Vide* "A Freak of Freedom," by Theodore Bent. Longmans & Co., 1879.

called to account for their stewardship. While in office they were of course inviolate but are now liable to punishment for any injustice or abuse of power that they may have committed. Such cases were not altogether unknown added our custodian with a solemn nod of his bewigged head.

We gazed long from the windows of the council chamber on the wonderful rocks of Montefeltro. Directly opposite to us and backed by tossed and broken summits rose the fortress of San Leo perched on its apparently inaccessible cliff and we remembered that the arch impostor Cagliostro died a prisoner within its walls.

But now the late afternoon effect illumining the wild landscape and bringing into relief range beyond range of ridges and peaks warned us that it was time to bid farewell to this aged republic and hasten back to the young kingdom of Italy.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPRI.

As all the world knows, this enchanting isle, the Capræ of the ancients, famed for grand scenery and beautiful women, lies exactly opposite Naples, across twenty miles of sea. And you cannot be at Naples and forget it. That precipitous double rock fills your thoughts as it charms your eyes, and draws you to it by a thousand threads. It is fascinating from every point of view. Whether flushed with jewelled sunset tints, veiled by opalescent haze, subdued to the faintest shadow on the waters, or looming stern and dark against a stormy sky, it has always a special beauty and significance. It is a storied rock; and memories of the tyrant of imperial Rome are

strangely mixed with sunny modern associations of poetry and art. For Capri has long been a paradise of painters ; artists have introduced its scenery and inhabitants to every gallery in Europe, while writers of all countries have descanted on its charms. Its mere outline has inspired a host of epithets. Strabo likened it to a wild boar, and derived its name from the Greek word for that animal ; Jean Paul has compared it with a sphinx ; Gregorovius with an ancient sarcophagus ; others with a lion couchant. And although tradition has dedicated to the sirens a group of rocks nearer the Sorrento shore, there is reason to suppose that Capri was the real Siren-isle of the *Odyssey*. The pebbly cove of the Piccola Marina, near the wild Faraglioni rocks, is still locally known as "La Sirena."

The island's Latin name, *Capræ*, is probably a corruption of its Greek appellation, while the term *Anacapri*, bestowed on its upper half, has an undoubted claim to Hellenic descent. In the physical aspect of Capri there is the same sharp contrast

between the ferocious and the beautiful that we note in its history. Savage, sea-washed crags wall in a garden land of softest beauty, and although so small an island—its circumference barely nine miles, its length four, its width one and a half—most varied scenery is comprised in its twenty square miles of soil.

Many years have passed since the present writer first set foot in Capri, but—like a first impression of Venice—that visit dwells fresh and vivid in the memory apart from all subsequent experience. There was no steam communication with Naples then. We crossed in a crowded market-boat, rejoiced by brilliant sunshine and a brisk following wind. We were young, the world was young, and we were bound for Capri. Nearer and nearer to the grand rock ; there was the port at last, and we scrambled to shore on benches through the surf, amid a vociferous parti-coloured throng ! Our enchanted isle was decidedly noisy, but none the less delightful for that. We were welcomed by red-capped, brown-legged fishermen,

handsome of face and dramatic of gesture, by still more dramatic well-fed beggar boys, by smiling, picturesque girls. Soon we were on donkey-back climbing the steep slope to the town, our luggage poised on the heads of the chattering Grecian goddesses at our heels. We looked on all we had heard described: the feast of warm light and colour, quaint flat-roofed houses, cactus and olive, oranges and vines, the sparkling gulf, wild, tumbled rocks—all were here. Yet, of course, all was utterly different from the imagined scene.

Many changes have come to Capri since then. The rough mule track from the haven is replaced by a good carriage road, and its easy zigzags now mount the cliff of Anacapri. The wonderful stairway has gone, with the five hundred rock-steps that seemed as many thousands to tired feet. And now that steamers puff to and fro with shoals of cheap trippers, the island and its sights are well nigh as hackneyed as Chamounix and Mont Blanc. Nothing, however, can vulgarise Capri. There is still the

complex witchery of its scenery and people, its rich vegetation, semi-eastern buildings, dark old-world associations and sunny modern life.

The island is a natural fortress, for, save at the Grande and Piccola Marina on the northern and southern sides, its precipices fall sheer into the sea, jutting out here and there into lofty headlands, and further guarded by fantastic outworks of crag and reef, sharp pinnacles and jagged fangs, only to be approached in the calmest weather. Everywhere the waves have scooped out deep caverns and archways, and gnawed the limestone into the strangest forms. Geologists tell us that Capri has not always stood at the same level, but alternately risen and sunk since its first upheaval. There is a row of water-worn caves about twenty feet above the actual sea-line, while numerous ruins partially submerged show that in the days of imperial Rome the island stood higher than at present. Then, too, the Piccola Marina was the only landing-place—the Grande Marina being probably the top of a cliff—

and the galleys of Tiberius were sheltered in an artificial harbour, under Capo Tragara, where, in the cave called the *Grotta dell' Arsenale*, interesting remains of Roman work have been found. So, in coasting round the island, you are chiefly impressed by its grand inaccessibility, but once ashore you find a smiling land of infinite variety and charm. The pretty little town stands on a ridge about five hundred feet above the sea, and with its white buildings, low-domed or flat-roofed and mosque-like church, has a distinctly oriental character. Feathery palms nod above dense, green orange groves, and little houses are bowered in vines and oleanders. A fertile valley dips southwards from the town, while to the east, broken ground rises to the bold heights once crowned by the fortified palace of Tiberius, the Villa Jovis, and the great lighthouse that flashed his signals and guided his fleets. And nearly everywhere you are gladdened by sight of the sea, the wonderful jewelled sea of lapis lazuli, sapphire and turquoise. Not only from breezy uplands fragrant

with myrtle, rosemary, and thyme, but among the olives, in copses of ash and laurel and arbutus, between the spikes of cactus-hedged lanes, or in deep ravines festooned with trailing greenery, you have sudden peeps of the glittering floor. And amid the varied fascinations of rock and ruin, orchard and woodland, of colour, atmosphere, and form, you forget the points of the compass, and when expecting to see the lonely main towards Africa, find yourself facing the headlands of Massa and Sorrento, and looking away past the Amalfi crests to the faint coast line by Pæstum, or in full view of the western isles, Ischia Ponza, etc., where you thought to see the white curves of the gulf, smoke-plumed Vesuvius and the clustered summits behind.

Before long you are perfectly intoxicated by the multitude of interests in Capri. Artists and archaeologists, geologists and historians, poets and ethnologists, Alpine climbers and boating men, may all find occupation here. Idlers even forget their *ennui*, for a time, in the simple novelty of Capri life, and invalids

gain strength in its balmy air and tranquillity. It is a true siren island, and its Greek-faced daughters still retain some of the gifts of their fabled ancestry. But before saying much of its inhabitants, it is necessary to give an outline of its history, following humbly in the track of J. R. Green, Gregorovius, and other skilled authorities.

No one knows when and by whom Capri was first inhabited. Traces of cave dwellers have been discovered, and the knives and arrowheads of a stone not indigenous to the island point to its early settlement by some tribe from the mainland. According to Virgil and Tacitus, it was first occupied by the Etruscans, and tradition assigns to the Phœnicians the foundation of the two cities of Capri and Anacapri, also deriving its name from the Phœnician word *Capriam* (two towns). What is certain is that it was a naval station of the Etruscans, that after their crushing defeat at Cumæ it fell into the power of their Hellenic conquerors and became part of the territory of the new city Neapolis across the gulf. On the

north-west side of the town of Capri there are still fragments of a cyclopean wall, built after the same fashion as the Acropolis of Cumæ. Telonc, the first Greek governor of the island, flourished in the eighth century, B.C. The Greek domination passed away and was followed by that of Rome. Succeeding ages brought new masters and new blood to the island, yet Hellas still reigns in Capri. As in other Greek colonics, in Sicily and the mainland, both in face and form, temperament and speech, its natives still bear the stamp of their far remote ancestry.

Under the Romans Capri merely served as a light-house station to guard the corn ships from Sicily through the Sorrento Straits, and did not emerge from obscurity until the closing years of the reign of Augustus. The aged emperor came to the island by chance ; a withered ilex—so runs the tale—put forth new leaves as he stepped ashore. Rejoiced by this good omen, and charmed by the scenery, climate, and people, he fell in love with Capri, and hastened to make it his private property, giving Ischia to the

Neapolitans in exchange. The island was now his summer resort, he immediately began the erection of a sumptuous abode on the site afterwards chosen for the Villa Jovis of his successor. Here he found rest from the cares of state, went about among the simple, kindly inhabitants, admired their proficiency in Grecian sports, and amused himself by making collections of fossil remains. It is said that Tiberius accompanied him on one of these holiday visits, but the new emperor only returned to the island when, after twelve years of storm and strife, he needed a safe retreat where he might plan his crimes and vent his lusts without fear of the assassin's knife.

Then for eleven years, from A.D. 26 until he went to his death at Misenum, A.D. 37, Tiberius made this lonely rock the seat of the Roman Empire, centre of the world's power. Scornfully rejecting the usual machinery of government, the emperor reduced his official suite to one senator, a few knights, and several Greek pedants, while keeping a host of slaves and concubines to minister to his wants. Thus

Tiberius asserted his personal rule, and boldly showed Rome and the world that he was the State, his coadjutors mere puppets danced by the strings in his grasp. The legend of the tyrant's life in Capri may be studied in Suetonius, with all its revolting details, and still lives in the memory of the natives. The eastern heights are known as Monte Tiberio—in dialect *Timberio*—and refractory babes are still quelled into silence by his name. In his time the sea-level was much lower than at present. The story of the rocks tells us that the Grande Marina did not exist, and that the only convenient access to the island was by the beach of the Piccola Marina. The emperor was forced to construct a port for his galleys, and exulted in his well-guarded solitude. We all know how barbarously he treated the obsequious fisherman, who, landing at a difficult point, dared to seek his presence with an offering of gurnet.

However much we may detest Tiberius the man, it is impossible not to admire the vast energy of the ruler, who, while busied with endless schemes and

intricate feats of diplomacy, found time to convert the crags and thickets of Capri into a paradise of pleasure and luxury. Besides his twelve villas, dedicated to the gods of Olympus, crowning the myrtle-grown hills, innumerable buildings rose from the earth at his bidding. The island swarms with Roman ruins: remains of docks and quays, temples and shrines, barracks, baths, cisterns and aqueducts, are everywhere to be traced on the small patch of soil constituting its lower half. Even now after ages of destruction, after the vigorous researches of Hadrowa in the last century, and of many later excavators, costly marbles and mosaics, statues, pottery and coins are still to be found in the vineyards and olive orchards. Many art treasures of the Naples Museum were disinterred in Capri; the numerous caves and grottoes contain traces of Roman handiwork, and a ruined temple to the sun-god Mithras still exists in the romantic depths of Val Metromania. The planning of all these undertakings might have filled the life of an ordinary man, yet all were accom-

plished during the last decade of the tyrant's reign. His chosen abode, the Villa Jovis, must have been a fortress-like structure of colossal size. Its fragments stand on a promontory more than 1,300 feet high, with sheer precipices on three sides commanding glorious views of sea and coast. On the south side terraced gardens draped the steep slopes to the plateau beneath. The *Salto di Timberio* at the edge of the cliff is said to be the spot where victims of the imperial wrath were hurled to the fishes, and the recent discovery of human bones imbedded in the stones below serves to support the theory. A complicated system of signals from watch-towers and lighthouses facilitated the emperor's communications with the mainland, and enabled him "to hold," as he said, "the Roman wolf by the ears."

With the death of Tiberius Capri lost all importance. Caligula is reported to have gone there only once, and Commodus used it as a place of exile for Crispina and Lucilla. On the fall of the Western Empire it became part of the Sorrento territory

subject to a Greek Duke of Naples. In the ninth century it was given to Amalfi by the Emperor Ludovic, and was frequently ravaged by the Saracen pirates established near Paestum. In the twelfth century it fell into the hands of King Roger of Sicily, and then passed with Naples beneath the sway of the Hohenstauffen, Anjou, and Aragon dynasties.

In modern times the English occupation of Capri on behalf of King Ferdinand, and its brilliant recapture by the French when Murat had succeeded Joseph Buonoparte on the Neapolitan throne, form the only noteworthy pages of its history.

The English were in Capri from 1805 to 1808, and having fortified it strongly, deemed it impregnable. In fact, two Neapolitan attacking expeditions were easily repulsed. But Murat adopted a wiler plan. Investing the island on three sides, part of his force under General Lamarque crept round the cliffs of Anacapri while Hudson Lowe was preparing to repulse the feigned attacks on the Grande and Piccola Marina. The ruse succeeded. A young Neapolitan officer of engineers

led the way to a point where boats could touch in smooth weather, the French effected a landing, and by means of scaling ladders mounted the plateau of Anacapri. But the alarm was speedily given, and before five hundred men were on shore the rising waves compelled the boats to put off. Then came a sharp struggle with a superior force, and but for the contradictory orders of the bewildered English commandant, the little band must have been swept into the sea. However, during the night they gained possession of the stockade at the head of the rock stairs, and the English, deceived as to the number of their assailants, withdrew into the Anacapri fort and capitulated the next morning.

Meanwhile the rest of Murat's force laid vigorous siege to the town and castle of Capri, where Lowe was shut up with seven hundred men waiting for help from Sicily. A few English cruisers blockaded the island, and kept up a continuous fire on the French. Nevertheless, Lowe surrendered after a fortnight's resistance, on the 18th of October, 1808, and had the mortification

of seeing the expected reinforcements arrive just after the treaty was signed. Colletta, the historian of Naples, gives a detailed account of the taking of Capri, but modestly withholds the fact that he was the officer of engineers who showed the way up the almost inaccessible crags. A local poet, one Maestro Francesco, of Anacapri, has sung the episode in limping verse, but his production is still in manuscript, and the reader's curiosity is soon satisfied.

Among the sights of Capri precedence must, of course, be given to the Blue Grotto. This is on the northern side of the island to the west of the Marina, and, as everyone knows, can only be entered through one small hole at the base of the cliff. As a matter of fact the opening is three feet and a half high by three in width, therefore quite practicable for the tiny boat into which you are transhipped ; but the knowledge that the least puff of wind, the least swell of the waves, may close the door, lends a pleasant excitement to your passage. Shooting through the arched darkness, you find yourself in a great vaulted cave, and gasp

with wonder and delight. You have left the sunlit world for a realm of blue fire! Rocks, air, and water, are alike intensely, luminously blue. And the water is transparent as the air. A brown-skinned boatman dives into it, and is at once a lovely form of blue and silver. No words can express the supernatural effect of the scene. Surely here the fire-flies must be born!

When calm enough to notice details you see that the cavern is about 150 feet long and over eighty wide, and that at the back there is a great archway, made by hands, leading to a dark, roughly-paved passage choked by masses of rock. This passage is said to have communicated with a Roman palace on the cliff above, but all attempts to explore it have failed. In front of the arch is a chiselled ledge and some ruined steps going down beneath the water. As for the marvellous colour, the flickering flames of blue and silver, we have not to seek far for the cause. The sunlight reflected in the sea passes into the grotto through a large submerged opening, probably the en-

trance in the days of Tiberius, when the passage now admitting us was merely a window. Then, of course, the grotto was an ordinary cavern, or recess, open to the sun. Deep holes gnawed round the grotto, about sixteen feet above the present water level, show that it must have been partly submerged during many centuries. And it seems to have been unknown in the Middle Ages. Later there was a tradition of the existence of a witches' cave at this part of the coast, and fishermen shuddered as they passed the haunted rocks, where the boom of the waves was so strangely echoed. The grotto was first mentioned in the seventeenth century, by the Neapolitan writer Bartolommeo Capaccio, and it seems to have been visited by Parrino, the author of a description of the Bay of Naples in 1727. But it did not become generally known before 1826, when two Germans, the poet Kopisch and the painter Fries, swam through the mysterious opening, and recorded the marvels they had seen in the travellers' book of Pagano's hotel. Since then the Blue Grotto of Capri has been one of the wonders of

the world, and writers from all countries have given their impressions of it. Hans Christian Andersen has made effective use of it in certain scenes of his "Improvisatore," and Gregorovius has described it exquisitely in his "Wanderjahre." A host of English pens, great and small, have treated the same theme. Mr. J. A. Symonds has dedicated to the grotto half a page of vivid prose with the fulness and concision of a sonnet, while an exhaustive and scientific account of it is to be found in the "Capri" of Colonel Mackowen, an American resident, whose spirited excavations have brought to light many treasures of the island and notably in the imperial ruins on the hillside above the grotto.

The caves of Capri are almost numberless. There is a lovely red grotto on the southern shore, and not far from it the famous green grotto under Monte Solaro, an enchanting nook where, in the depths of emerald water beneath emerald rocks, you see strange spots of red fire as your oars disturb masses of small jelly-fish, sea-anemones, and other elemental forms of life. This

cave has a navigable passage, through which some fishermen once eluded the pursuit of Saracen corsairs, and gave the alarm of their approach. Then there is the stalactite cavern, known as the White Grotto, the Grotta dell' Arsenale, full of Roman mosaics and masonry, and many others all round the coast, and high above the sea, that are more or less unexplored.

At first sight Capri seems to be a gentle, Amazonian isle. As most of the able-bodied men-folk gain their living on the sea, away at the coral fisheries on the Barbary coast, or cruising to Marseilles and South America, so, excepting the fishermen at the Marina, some broken-down loungers on the little Piazza, and a sturdy, brown-legged, rising generation clamouring everywhere for alms, you see hardly any male Capriotes, and the whole business of life is apparently conducted by women. It is impossible to quarrel with this arrangement, for the women of Capri are exceptionally charming, bright-eyed, smiling, vivacious creatures, with classic heads and a statuesque grace and freedom of movement. Good

creatures too, modest, laborious, strong enough for the hardest toil, and in all ways superior to the same class on the mainland. No wonder that painters flock here in search of models! Whether driving donkeys, picking olives, herding goats, dressing vines, carrying piles of fish and loads of stone poised on their pretty heads, spinning, weaving, or hawking corals and shells, these women are always delightful subjects for the brush. The brilliant costumes once worn in the island have almost disappeared, but bright-hued skirts, orange kerchiefs, silver hair-pins, and showy ornaments are still to be seen, and at every turn one comes on some figure or group recalling the idylls of ancient Greece. Here, for instance, are Costanziella and Carmela tripping down the hill-side with their goats. They are going to dance in the evening, and one of them is already thrumming the brisk measure on her upraised basket. The destruction of the stairs of Anacapri at the edge of the cliff has deprived the island of one of its best *mises en scènes*, but at least the women's toil is lightened by the

new road, and there are plenty of effective back-grounds still left.

It is difficult, nowadays, to persuade girls to sit to artists, for although they enjoy the easy profitable work, the priests forbid it, and allow no regular models to figure as *Figlie della Madonna* in the feasts of the Church. For the same reason a genuine tarantella is no longer easy to arrange. The girls are forbidden to dance in public, and although catch-penny tarantellas are got up at the hotels, they are not quite the real thing. Sometimes, however, a friendly boatman, or model, will invite you to a domestic festivity. Brother "Giusepp" has returned from the coral fisheries with money in his purse, or the pretty Nunziatella is betrothed. Then, seated under the trellis by the little flat-roofed white house, high above the sea, you behold the tarantella to perfection. The performers are untiring, and as couple after couple tread the fantastic, whirling pantomime of love and courtship, pursuit, rebuff, encouragement, and capture, you comprehend the witchery of the ancient

dance. An old mother thrums on the tambourine with wagging head and twitching feet as though she longed for a more active share in the sport. The stars come out, and the smoke plume of Vesuvius over there across the gulf is backed by silvery cloudlets. What if the company be a little noisy, the jokes a trifle broad? The Capri dialect with its strange gutturals and abbreviations, is not quickly understood, the music keeps up a running accompaniment ; there are flowers all about, sweet scents in the air, and you see a tall palm among the oranges through yonder archway. Then your hosts are so hospitable and kind, so anxious to know the number and ages of your children ! A young girl, still panting from the dance, with flushed cheeks and soft brown eyes, offers you a plate of Indian figs green, pink, and red, daintily peeled and built up in a pyramid, while her married sister, a grave, young Juno with an infant Bacchus at her breast, sits down and talks of the family troubles—of a brother lost at sea, and of the poor distraught wife who daily went down to the

shore with dry clothes for the shipwrecked one whom the waves must surely bring back to her !

Intercourse with these pleasant islanders brings to light many curious superstitions and scraps of folklore. Here is a string of them collected by an old resident. No Capriote will kill a snake *in his own garden*. It would bring ill-luck to the house. House lizards, too, are held sacred ; no one may kill them. Though quite harmless, these hideous little reptiles, miniature dragons with wickedly staring, projecting eyes, are very uncanny room-companions.

Children born on St. Paul's Day are never bitten by snakes, and may handle them with impunity, but should they kill one the charm is broken. There are stories, too, of enraged snakes beating men black and blue with their tails.

L'Ombra della Casa, is a Capriote version of the Scotch Brownie. Every household is supposed to have a guardian spirit, now and then seen in the shape of a withered old woman. Sometimes when a family moves to a new house, the *Ombra* disapproves of the

change, and all goes wrong until there is another flitting.

There are some pretty love-charms in Capri. To win a girl's heart the lover must steal a hair from her head and tie it to one of his own. So long as the knot holds firm his love is returned. This resembles the charm used on the sacred hill of Monte Vergine, near Naples. There, betrothed pilgrims fasten broom twigs, together with a strip of rag, and until the twigs part their love endures. Rags flutter on every bush along the path to the great sanctuary, and married couples often return there to examine their united twigs. Ill-matched pairs probably scorn to renew the pilgrimage. Love-sick maids and men mix a drop of their blood in a little wine, and persuade the object of their affections to drink it. This is an infallible love-philtre. A man may also win a girl's heart by pricking her name upon a fig-leaf, and letting the wind blow it away.

Among curious death-customs is the habit of keeping fast closed the windows of the mourning-house

lest the "Bad Bird" should come and bear off the corpse. This is plainly a survival of the old belief in harpies.

Less than twenty years ago it was still the Capri custom, whenever there was a death, for the women to go up on the house-top tearing their faces and hair, uttering fearful shrieks and lamentations. When silenced by fatigue they remained standing with the palms of the hands pressed to the back of the head, and their elbows raised. This being the conventional attitude of grief, it was thought to be unlucky at other times. People would then say, "That is a bad sign! Lower your arms."

At a funeral the relations refuse to allow their dead to be carried away, disputing, and even coming to blows with the priests. In some instances the latter have brought them to trial for assault and battery.

It seems strange to find a belief in wehr-wolves in this southern island. When dogs bark loudly at night the Capriotes say that "the wolf is out." A friend of the present writer knew a man said to be

a wehr-wolf. He suffered from a form of epilepsy, and during the attacks his finger-nails were curved and the hairs on his body bristled like those of an angry cat. When in this state he would rush at persons and dogs, snapping and biting. Another man, similarly afflicted, forbade his wife to let him into the house, when he returned late at night, without first looking at his hands through a hole in the wall. If the nails were bent she must not open to him, or he might tear her to pieces.

Folk-lore, as we all know, is the common property of many and widely distant lands. Everywhere, beneath the embroidery of local details, we find the same groundwork. So among the witch-tales of Capri, we discover a variant of a famous northern legend.

A sailor had drawn his boat ashore at the Grande Marina, and lay sleeping in it under the bows, when he was suddenly awakened by voices close by. Three veiled women stepped aboard and muttered some magic words. Instantly the boat glided into the

water, and, without sails or oars, sped swiftly over the sea. The man remained motionless, half paralysed with fear. At last the boat touched a sandy shore, the women leapt out, and made their way to the anchored vessels of the coral-fishers, where their husbands lay asleep. The man, after watching their movements, landed in his turn, climbed a palm tree in a grove by the beach, tore off a cluster of dates, and then hurried back to the boat. After some time, the women returned and again their incantations sent them flying through the waves. The weary sailor was presently overcome by sleep, and on re-awakening found himself again high and dry on the Capri Marina, and in broad daylight. He stared, rubbed his eyes, surely his adventure was all a dream ! But no, there lay the date-branch by his side ! He had been to Barbary with the witches ! So, proof in hand, he hurried to the Piazza and told his tale.*

At Sorrento lives an old man known as the "wizard

* The Venetians have the same legend, but their witches crossed to Alexandria.

of the glittering eyes." He is often consulted by the Capriotes, and said to have performed some marvellous cures. A young girl was fading away, the doctors could do nothing for her. So the wizard was called from the mainland, and, after some mystic forms, told the mother that her child was bewitched and that in order to destroy the spell a certain fig tree must be dug up by the roots and burnt. This was done, and the girl immediately recovered.

In another similar case he prescribed a still stranger remedy. The girl was to hold in her hands a heart torn from a dead body, and repeat the words: "May the ill in me pass out into thee." The patient and her family accordingly tried to get at a corpse awaiting burial in the dead-house of the cemetery, but were surprised by the watchers.

A woman, whose husband was away coral fishing on the African coast, was worried by the visits of a big black cat, which repeatedly made its way into her house by night. At last, in a fit of exasperation, she pelted the animal with stones and broke one of its

legs. When her husband returned to Capri he walked lame, and told his wife it was her fault. Why had she broken his leg when he came to see her in the shape of a cat?

Save to hasty tourists, content to do the sights between their steamers, the artist colony of Capri must always be one of its main attractions. Indeed, the influence of the island on modern painting would be an interesting chapter in the history of art. We have only to look in at Pagano's hotel to find the pictured records of generations of painters from various parts of the world. There are many studios on the island, and England and France are specially well represented. Sir Frederic Leighton is an old *habitué*, frequently returning to sketch; and some of his most delightful heads and landscape studies are of Capri birth. Mrs. Anderson is an old resident, and Mr. Walter Maclaren has also had a studio there for many years. The French painter, Hamon, whose dreamy poetic works enjoyed European popularity before the rise of the realistic school, worked for many

seasons in his Capri home. The Capri subjects of Jean Benner and Edouard Sain are well known in the Paris Salon, and the second named artist owns a house and studio on the quiet heights of Anacapri.

The Nestor of the artist colony is Mr. J. Talmage White, who has been established on the island since 1861. He owns several studios at Valentino, the western end of the ridge on which the town of Capri is situated. One of these is occupied by his son, Mr. Albert Garibaldi White; another by the well-known American painter, Mr. C. C. Coleman, who has decorated it with exquisite taste. Mr. White's studio is a place of pleasant memories as the rendezvous of the art world of Capri, and its fascinations are increased by a fine collection of majolica and antiquities, Damascus tiles, Japanese stuffs, curios, and weapons. It is a most picturesque interior; its great north window commands a glorious view over the bay and Vesuvius, with Mrs. Anderson's cypresses and garden trees in the foreground, while the eastern window frames a glowing vignette of sea and

shore towards Salerno and the distant point of Licosia. Mr. White always has several oil pictures in different stages of progress, and portfolios of water-colour drawings and studies stand temptingly open. Not a little might be said regarding these works did not relationship to their owner seal my lips. But I may say that I am indebted to Mr. White's intimate knowledge of the island for many details of its manners and customs. His long residence, too, has brought him some droll experiences, for Capri would seem to be a favourite resort of eccentrics.

What can we think of the earnest amateur who prowled through the studios turning all the pictures upside down and buying a few that pleased him in that position? We all know the tale of the Englishman, Thorold, who, straying to the island for a single day, remained in it forty years; but the German who was driven from the Quisisana hotel by the coarse table manners of the British, and their habit of putting their knives in their mouths, is a less familiar character. This same German, during one of his first

strolls in Capri, saw a beautiful girl in the old costume of the island bending over the edge of a frightful precipice. Hurriedly advancing, the kind man, in his best German-Italian, besought her to leave the dangerous spot. But the girl would not stir, only sadly shook her head.

"Lofely maid!" cried the German, "why do you despair? Are there no men more in the world, that you, so charming, so handsome, should weary of life? For, yes! I know your purpose, you seek to die!" Trembling with emotion the girl turned her head aside. "Come," urged the German, "don't, pray don't do it!"

At this the girl turned her streaming eyes full upon him, and starting up suddenly, answered, "The signore is right, I will not do it."

The German went away rejoicing; he had saved the poor creature's life. But the next day chancing to pass the spot again, he was thunderstruck by finding the same girl in the same attitude. He was about to seize her arm, when a loud voice behind him said,

"Please, sir, keep on one side! I can't see my model!"

There was an artist at his easel behind a big rock. The German walked on.

At all seasons of the year Capri is a pleasant resort, Even in July and August fresh breezes temper the midday heat, and in winter the climate is delightfully equal. Delicate folk may enjoy a southern aspect, sheltered from every breath of north wind, among the olives of Quisisana, though the island has few conveniences or resources for those who are seriously ill, and the dust wind from Africa is often very trying in early winter. Spring, as everywhere in the south, is a brief season of delight. One day the fruit trees are still bare, cold blasts blow across from the snow-capped peaks of the mainland, the next you behold sea and rocks through a pink haze of almond and peach blossom, and hosts of wild flowers open their eyes to the warmth. It is as sudden a transformation as the Primavera of Botticelli. The sun blazes with tremendous strength, the air is thin and pure, and all the effects are marvellously delicate.

But for long walks and scrambles—and who can be in Capri without longing to scramble?—late autumn is the best time. It is then that you mount the summit of Monte Solaro, and look beyond jewelled islands and jewelled sea, right away to the Roman mountains, then that you scale rocks and win your way by narrow ledges round the crags of Tragara, clinging with hand and foot to the rough limestone, and scarcely daring to give a glance to the blue depths of water a thousand feet below. It is then you find energy to explore the caves and grottoes, the Roman and mediæval remains, castle and monastery. And the spell of the island grows daily stronger; you cannot bid it good-bye. On our first visit it needed an eruption of Vesuvius to tear us away. It was a most dramatic finale to our Capri idyll. A rain of ashes fell on the island and lay many inches thick on the window-sills. We were choked and blinded by the fine impalpable dust, the air was murky as a London fog! The dull, dark sea rose against the rocks in long, oily swells, there were thunderous booms

from the distant mountain. Torre del Greco was shattered by earthquake, and at night the new twin craters on the flank of Vesuvius gleamed like monster owl's eyes across the sea. So Vesuvius snapped the spell of Capri, and the next day saw us embarked for Naples in a small rowing-boat. A few yards from shore, and where was our beautiful island? It was gone, vanished, lost in the dense cloud of ashes!

CHAPTER VII.

SAN MARTINO DI CASTROZZA.

SOUND asleep in the "Golden Ship," snuggest and quaintest of hostelries, why do I dream of the Italian opera in old Covent Garden? Why am I listening to Meyerbeer's Curfew Chorus, why watching the march of the Paris patrol? I wake with a start to find myself standing on the floor in the dark. Am I still dreaming? Where am I? What strange chant is ringing in my ears?

"*Vigilate pel fuoco ; son battute le due ; sia lodato il nome di Gesù Cristo.*"* This is what I hear. I am in Tirol, at Predazzo, and the town watchman is going his rounds! I return to bed shivering and

* "Beware of fire. 'Tis two in the morning. Praise be the name of Jesus Christ."

happy. Two days' leisurely travel through woods and valleys towards the heart of the Dolomites, with enticing glimpses of the summits for which we are bound, have already tuned me to holiday pitch. So, now this voice of the night completes the enchantment. In some topsy-turvy, illogical way, Predazzo's dread of blazing rafters makes the work-a-day world forgotten, and transports me into fairyland. And South Tirol is, indeed, the fairyland of Europe. Of course, as happens to most of us at first sight of long-desired regions, it is a struggle to adjust actual impressions to those derived from books. All the mental pictures gleaned from Gilbert and Churchill, Ball, Freshfield and Tuckett, Miss Edwardes and Walter White have all to be shaken up, like pieces in a kaleidoscope, and fitted to reality. Fortunately, almost everywhere in Tirol reality surpasses expectation. No eloquence can exaggerate the grandeur of the drive to San Martino by Paneveggio and Rolle, no word-painting do justice to its beauty of colour! What more roman-

tic approach to the weird splendours of the Cimone range than the slow ascent past flower-strewn meads, through the wild Travnolo gorge—musical with the rush of waters—where now and again spectral peaks and glittering ice-fields appear in mid-air, above the trees, to the mighty forests on the slopes of the Costonzella Pass! What a fascinating medley of romance and rusticity at Paneveggio, where the midday halt is made! The inn seems to have dropped out of the pages of Grimm's "Household Tales." Its wonderful kitchen with the bow-windowed circular hearth must surely be "redded up" by elves at night; and the pigs and geese, cows and mules outside seem properties, as *knechte* and *kellnerinnen* are personages, of the same dear old tales. But for the stronger attraction of the beckoning peaks beyond one would willingly spend weeks among the scented glades, sawmills, and torrents of these enchanted woods.

Up and on for hours amid ranks of stately pines, where squirrels frisk from branch to branch, and past

flowery glens and flashing cascades, until at last the summit of the Pass is won.

The air is exhilarating as champagne out on this wild upland ; we are on the top crust of the globe, and on all sides lies "a tossing world of stone." Companies of tall, faint peaks are ranged in the distance—but where is King Cimone, whose grey and yellow horns have been our beacons for days? Straight ahead of us is nothing but a blank wall of mist! Presently an icy wind rushes over the moorland ; the mist wall parts and discloses the whiter white of snows surmounted by jagged pinnacles, and buttressed by precipitous cliffs. But Cimone's royal head remains wrapped in his cloud-mantle. Only at intervals just a fold of the drapery falls aside, revealing an orange flank and some magnificent crags.

A sharp shower now drives us to shelter in the little wooden post-house at Rolle, but it is soon over, and the sun shines over the weird landscape. There at last is Cimone in his full majesty, with his rugged

consort, the Cima di Vezzano, by his side. Their snow-throne is guarded by bristling, twisted cliffs, where lines of glittering limestone, alternated with stripes of red and yellow sandstone, seem like colossal versions of the Alum Bay sand-bottles so dear to our infancy.

The descent to San Martino reveals fresh marvels at every turn, for southwards, beyond Cimone, extends a range of towers and pinnacles above perilous slopes of snow-white *débris*. We wind down into an amphitheatre of greenery, seamed by numerous ravines, encircled by forests of fir and larch. Above the zone of trees to the right are the granite crags of Colbricon and Tognazzo. Far ahead at the end of the valley rise the Vette di Feltre, delicate, opalescent, southern heights, whose Italian colours, luminous grey and peacock and purple, are in lovely contrast with the sterner tints and dazzling white of the Dolomite chain and the deep red of granite Colbricon. The soft curves of the Vette culminate in the broad pyramid of the Pavione, otherwise Col

di Luna or Mountain of the Moon, whence all Venetia and the Adriatic may be seen. Minor details complete the beauty of the scene. Those rosy patches among bilberries and ferns tell us that the Alpine rhododendron is still in bloom; the arnica daisy flaunts its orange petals on the turf, and Scotch blue-bells cluster thickly by the roadside. The dash of hidden water, the tinkle of cow-bells, and the voice of the wind in the trees form a fitting accompaniment to this mountain symphony. And here at last is San Martino on the meadow-slope above the Cimone torrent. There is just one hotel at right angles with the picturesque eleventh-century hospice founded by a Bishop of Trent for the use of pilgrims over the difficult Pass, a pretty little church, a house for the priest, two or three cottages, and a few scattered barns and sheds. It is a delicious summer retreat, and no little gratitude is owed to the Alpinists who first proclaimed its delights and scaled its virgin peaks. The open space in front of the hotel is bordered by a low wall guarding a vegetable

plot ; there is no garden, no attempt at a pleasure ground ; but who cares for the lack of these when you can exult in the sight of the mighty summits tossed against the sky ? Mightiest of all is King Cimone, then come the glittering pinnacles of the Rosetta, divided by an ice-filled gully from the stern precipice of the Pala di San Martino. Beyond the snowy windings of the Passo Ball and the Cima, also christened by the accomplished mountaineer who first set foot on its peak, rise the formidable crags of the Sasso Maior striding southwards to the fantastic pillars and spires overhanging Val Canale. Seen from Primiero these crags resemble monstrous veiled figures, and it was a happy thought of Messrs. Gilbert and Churchill to give them the name of the "Procession Mountain." And at the base of this magic range are emerald pastures broken by wild ravines, where torrents foam amid Alpine roses and dark wedges of forest stream down into the valley.

Now that the new road by the Fonzaso Pass brings San Martino within one day's journey from

Venice, it will soon become a fashionable resort, and be overrun by tourists. Already we hear that it is to be managed by an enterprising hotel-keeper from Trent, and fitted with every luxury and comfort. But in the summer of 1881 life was idyllic at San Martino. Two pleasant ladies excepted, our own family and friends were the only permanent boarders, and the perfect freedom was more than sufficient compensation for the roughness of the fare. Our host was paying the penalty for his attempt to starve his guests of the previous year, but his bad season was a delightful one for us. Now and then a carriage would arrive, bristling with alpenstocks, and filled with gaitered mountaineers. Then, for a day or so, the table would be enlivened by tales of mountain feats ; there would be much stamping of nailed boots overhead during the small hours, and young men, standing about the front door with their legs well apart, as if spanning some *crevasse*, would learnedly discourse, telescope in hand, of the route trodden, or to be trodden, to this or that summit.

But these were only occasional breaks in our tranquil existence. The seclusion of San Martino was not the least of its charms, and the daily post-cart brought us sufficient news of the outer world. Was there not endless variety on the face of our mountains, endless excitement in exploring this ravine or that glen, in wandering through the silent woods, following the windings of water-courses, or climbing to distant *malghe* (dairies) to feast on bowls of cream? What harvests of mountain flowers we gleaned! Arnica and aconite, and gentians of every kind, rare ferns and fragrant *nigritella*, familiar English weeds, and now and then a cluster of splendid edelweiss! What feasts of wild fruit—bilberries and strawberries, raspberries and delicate *canastrelle* (*Rubus saxatilis*)! And what a memorable day was that, when after hopelessly losing our way among dank, dark glades, and stumbling across rocky torrents, through miry bogs, and up and down steep and stony paths, we suddenly emerged on the longed-for shores of the lovely Colbricon tarn, and recognised in certain far-

away dark peaks the familiar forms of the Rosengarten! Yet after all such excursions we always hurried homewards with the feeling of spectators who have carelessly missed part of a great play. For what words can describe the endless drama of effects to be seen in our valley? How catalogue the changing aspects of its guardian peaks? On sunny mornings they stand clean carved against the sky—an army of spires and pinnacles, towers and teeth. Then their prevailing tints are whitish-grey and yellow; their powdering of crystalline detritus seems the hoariness of age; blue-glancing ice-caves can be seen in the recesses above their snows. They seem to lean forward over the valley; a stone from your hand, you think, might almost strike their flanks. As the day grows, they faint in the quivering light, are half dissolved into pale, translucent ghosts. Soon perhaps vapour wreaths float slowly up, hover about across their dim shapes, while massive cumuli assemble in the sky. Sometimes the vapours thicken, ragged rain-clouds drape our giants' sides, their tops

are closely veiled. Then, all of a sudden, the August sun breaks out, strikes perhaps Cimone's summit, and behold a huge golden radiance throned on cushions of mist! At sunset, our peaks burn with orange light, and next when shadows begin to darken the valley, and the forest walls are densest black, they are rosy flames piercing the heavens, every spire and pinnacle ablaze with the afterglow.

Presently the colours fade, and our Dolomites, cold as Despair, rear their fantastic forms against the pale evening sky. But in a short time there is a brightness to the east, and long before the moon has mounted high enough to touch the foremost peaks, the Pala is bathed in its radiance, and soon needle and horn and spire exult in the new splendour, and the valley is flooded with silvery light.

Bad weather brings sights of a wilder sort. Mists sweep hither and thither with an almost audible swirl; storm clouds do battle overhead; the forest-clad hills are phantoms in black and grey. The wind howls and moans through the woods, and its recurrent

bursts, mingled with the voice of the torrent, sounds like the rush of the tide on a rock-bound shore. The rain pelts steadily for hours, the fog-curtain draws closer and closer. Then, all at once, the north wind comes tearing over the Pass ; the rain ceases, shutters flap, and casements tremble. The turmoil goes on all night ; in the morning sunshine greets you, but summer has fled. There is snow on all the mountains down to the edge of the pines ; ruddy Colbricon and verdant Tognazzo are like frosted cakes, and every level inch and cranny of the Dolomites are also dazzling white. Contrasted with these glittering patches, Cimone's greys and yellows are tawniest orange and black, and the red-sand strata of the Rolle cliffs are the colour of raspberry jam.

On Sundays and holidays San Martino is a centre of gaiety. Herdsmen and haymakers from the neighbouring Alps come trooping in with their families, and rest on the low wall before the hotel until the Mass bell rings. It is pretty to see the reverent crowd flocking up the slope to the church

the women hat in hand like the men, and tiny children toddling in the rear! Cheery Don Cirillo, the priest, who on week days is constantly lounging about, chatting or playing at bowls, and with a dot of a black dog, like a full stop, at his heels, is invisible on holy mornings. Only at the last stroke of the bell he issues from his back door in full canonicals, and slowly crosses the turf to the church porch. His dog accompanies him even to the altar, and thence emits feeble barks at any strange face among the congregation. Worn by age, with a crippled leg and a weak constitution, this comic animal answers to the name of Hercules. Evidently his master has a streak of humour in his composition. A kindly, social man too is Don Cirillo, well pleased to enliven his dull days by doing the honours of San Martino to Italian-speaking guests. His winters must be terribly dreary, for often his church is buried in snow-drifts, he has to say Mass in his little pink house by the hospice, and during eight months of the year the hotel is closed. No wonder that the good man makes the most of

summer visitors, and winks at the gaieties of his flock ! Sometimes, when an accordion player can be got from Primiero, the lads and lassies dance in the *osteria*, and the rival beauties, fair-haired Anna of the hotel, and the dark-eyed maid of the inn, divide the gallant attentions of herdsmen and guides.

The inhabitants of this valley are cheerful and friendly, and have a grace of manner that is distinctly Italian. One day, on the seven miles' walk to Primiero, we stopped to rest by a wayside cottage. The cool forest had long been left behind, and we were in the full blaze of the August sun. A pretty young girl, with little black ringlets escaping from her felt hat, espied us from her potato patch above, and instantly came speeding down to bid us welcome, and invite us into the house. We bought a few eggs, and asked for water, and the girl attended to our wants with pleasant alacrity. Soon her smiling mother came in from the fields, and, seating herself on the bench by the bed, began to chat with the ease of a lady hostess. She was interested to learn that

we lived in Italy, had once been there, she said, to the shrine of St. Antonio, at Padua. Mother and daughter loaded us with good wishes when we rose to take leave. I told the pretty girl that I hoped she would soon find a good husband. Thereupon, with a quick smile and blush, she replied that she need not return the compliment, since I had one already.

Whenever we passed that cottage on subsequent walks the whole family would turn out to greet us, and pretty Lisa never failed to offer us a glass of water from the spring. The town of Primiero, its sights and excursions, must be reserved for a future paper, but our first visit there made us acquainted with one of the most interesting of its inhabitants.

We naturally went to the comfortable, wainscotted inn of the brothers Bonetti, whose names are so honourably recorded in all books on Tirol. Rested and refreshed, we had barely started on our up-hill drive back to San Martino, when our handsome young coachman began to hum snatches of song in a singularly sweet voice. We pricked up our ears, asked a

few questions, and found that this was the Bonetti with the wonderful tenor mentioned by Miss Edwards and Walter White. Would he sing us something? The young man was delighted to meet with appreciative listeners, and readily poured forth song after song. Truly it was a wonderful voice, pure and sweet and powerful, with no defects save those of imperfect training. Whether trudging up-hill beside his horses, or seated on his box, this born artist sang with equal ease. He gave us many operatic airs in succession, and wound up with an Ave Maria admirably suited to the time and place. We were climbing the road through the forest, evening was at hand, and the radiant peaks and snows of Cimone were shining high in air beyond the firs. It was a culmination of delight to hear those sweet, grave notes in such a scene!

Then our tenor told us his tale—a simple tale of hardship and renunciation. In his boyhood he had hoped to be a professional singer, even “perhaps to tread the boards. A friendly maestro who often

came to Primiero promised to try to gain him admission to the Conservatoire of Milan. Meanwhile he went to Italy and began to study his art in earnest. But after a few months his father died suddenly, and the youth was recalled to Primiero to help his mother and brother in the hotel. All hope of a musical career seemed at an end, yet he did not despair, but worked and waited. Then came a harder blow. He was drawn for the conscription, and had to serve three years in the Austrian cavalry. Fortunately, being nearly always quartered in Vienna, he heard much excellent singing, with the further good luck of a musical captain, who gave him much teaching and encouragement. Accustomed to horses, and a capital rider, young Bonetti had grown quite reconciled to his military life when an unlucky accident changed it to a martyrdom. One day his charger, an extremely vicious and hard-mouthed brute, bolted with him through the suburbs of Vienna, and was only pulled up after a wild gallop of nearly an hour. Bonetti was instantly arrested, tried, and condemned to three

months' *carcere duro*, i.e., to imprisonment in irons, with bread and water and a plank bed. Thanks to the intercession of his friendly superior, the sentence was commuted to one month; but those terrible thirty days half killed the youth. The injustice of the punishment cut into his soul as the irons into his flesh, and he came out of prison a changed man. When his three years were ended the good captain tried to tempt him to remain in the service, and assured him of speedy promotion. But Bonetti refused. "How could I stay," he said, "when I had been treated like a felon?"

So now he has come back to his valley for life. He is quite happy, he says, and sings a great deal. A maestro from Munich comes every year to Primiero, gets up concerts, and teaches him new songs. What more could he desire? Yet he sighed as he expressed his content. He pressed us to come to the Primiero church to hear the musical Mass of the 15th of August, and before we rattled over the wooden bridge to the lighted door of our hotel he had taught one of

our party the words and music of a pretty little national air that is constantly sung by the peasants of San Martino

MOBETTINA



NOTE—The hotel is now much improved. An excellent table is kept, there are two posts daily and numerous improvements are promised by the enterprising new proprietor.

CHAPTER VIII.

VAL D'AOSTA.

THE four highest peaks in Europe, Mont Blanc, Monte Rosa, the Grand Paradis, and the Matterhorn, crown the mountain walls of this Italian valley. Its scenery is of the most varied grandeur and beauty ; it is thronged with historic associations, Roman and mediæval remains, and has abundant interest for geologists, mineralogists, and botanists. .

Yet it is comparatively little known to the general traveller, and, until the other day, means of transport were scarce and good accommodation only to be had in one or two spots. Now, however, the completion of the Aosta railway—celebrated last summer with much pomp and festivity : martial music, speeches

and crackers—brings the beauties of the district within easy reach of tourists from Turin, and better hotels will follow in due course.

A week before the line was opened we set out for Aosta on the brightest of midsummer mornings. The cornfields were a shimmer of red gold among the vines of the fat Piedmontese plains, and although the church bells were ringing and villagers everywhere trooping past in holiday dress, the sickle was already at work. For, throughout the Italian lowlands, harvest-time begins on St. John's Day. This year, 1886, the country folk looked to the festival with fear and misgiving. Corpus Domini fell on the same day, and by ancient prophecy this was a sign that the end of the world was near. Some timid persons went so far as to make their wills, a truly superfluous measure in view of the expected event. By another fateful coincidence St. Peter's feast was on Ascension Day, and a Florentine good-wife declared she had been favoured with a view of the saint walking in the sun arm-in-arm with St. John.

Of all the pleasures of travel, one, the most exquisite, is the approach to unfamiliar mountains. Before leaving the train at Donnaz we were already within the gates of the hills, had passed the grand mouth of the Lysthal at Pont St. Martin, and seen the torrent, spanned by a daring Roman bridge, bring tribute to the main stream of the Dora Baltea. This dashing river was already our close companion, and we were to trace its waters back to their cradle in the glaciers of Mont Blanc. Luxuriant fields, meadows, and vineyards, fruit-trees, olcanders, and cypress-spires beneath crowding peaks and cloud-capped summits formed a fascinating mixture of the stern and the beautiful, and we congratulated ourselves on being able to enjoy it all at our leisure from a carriage instead of hurrying through by rail. But we had counted without the dust, Val d'Aostan dust, notorious for its quantity and quality. Dust, fine, white, and dense, but not, alas, impalpable! It lay ten inches thick on the road, drifted over us in choking, blinding clouds, and compelled us to view the landscape

through peepholes in triple veils. No rain had fallen in these parts for months, although our Tuscan June had been tempered by frequent storm-showers.

Of Donnaz we saw little that blazing noon-day, save the Egyptian plague of flies in its too primitive tavern ; but it owns a Roman road and arch, and on the cloven rocks above the inscription, "*Transitus Annibalis*," is said to have been formerly legible. Of feudal remains we saw plenty, for there was constant strife in this border valley, and, whenever free from invading hosts, its chieftains kept their arms from rusting by quarrelling among themselves. Besides numerous castles there are watch-towers on every cliff, at every turn, by which fiery signals were flashed from place to place ; and as a high road to the great passes of the Alps, the Val d'Aosta has always played a special part in Italian history.

Its earliest known inhabitants were the Salassi, a Ligurian tribe supposed to have colonised it under their chief, Cordelus, son of Statielus, a descendant of Saturn. They founded a city named Cordela, but in

what part of the valley is uncertain. Some writers place it on the site afterwards occupied by Aosta, others, near Aymaville at the opening of the Val de Cogne, while several assign to it a spot still called Mas de Cordele, near Pré St. Didier.

What is certain is that the Salassi were a strong but peaceful race, devoted to agriculture and mining, and who preserved their independence long after the tribes on the plains had submitted to the Roman yoke. Hannibal's descent *per Cremonis Jugum*, the Little St. Bernard, left their power unshaken, and it was not until about the year 141 B.C. that their deadly struggle with Rome began. A neighbouring tribe in the plains had called the enemy upon them by complaining to the Senate that these Salassi deprived it of water by diverting rivers to feed their mills and smelting houses. Appius Claudius marched his cohorts into the valley, but met with a crushing defeat. Fresh expeditions followed, but with only partial success, and more than a hundred and twenty years passed before they were finally subdued. Then

indeed they were almost exterminated ; their capital city Cordela was razed to the ground, and Augusta Pratoria built on the site of Varro's camp. The triumphal arch at the entrance of Aosta proves how the victory was prized ; while the massive remains of walls and ramparts, of theatre, amphitheatre, and forum attest the prosperity and importance of the new Roman town. Augusta was not only a great military station ; it was also a centre of commerce, and the iron, lead, and silver mines of its neighbouring mountains, its numerous mineral springs and fertile lands, were all sources of wealth to the imperial treasury.

After the destruction of the Empire the Val d'Aosta, together with the Graian and Pennine Alps, was incorporated in the Burgundian kingdom under Gondicar. Goths and Lombards then ruled it in turn, it was reconquered by Gontran of Burgundy, became subject to the last Merovingian kings, and thus passed beneath Charlemagne's sway. It was joined later to Trans-Juran Burgundy, and after a

long period of war and change, concerning which little precise knowledge can be gained, became subject to Savoy, by the marriage of Adelaide of Susa with Oddo of Maurienne, son of Count Humbert "of the White Hand," founder of the reigning House of Savoy. Erected into a duchy by the Emperor Frederic II., the valley thenceforth enjoyed important privileges under its feudal chief the Count of Savoy.

Once every seven years at least, the Count crossed the Alps by the Little St. Bernard, to hold a court of justice in Aosta. All the nobles of the valley rode to meet him at the head of the pass, to tender homage, and lay the keys of their strongholds at his feet. And this was no empty form. The keys were always accepted, and special governors appointed to occupy the castles during the Count's stay in Aosta. At La Salle, where the present sovereign of Italy owns a fine hunting lodge (his father's favourite resort), the nobles used to form in procession to escort their ruler to the capital. (But if the Count chose to enter the valley by any other way than the specified route of the

Little St. Bernard, the barons were dispensed from meeting him and from all the ceremonies of a State reception.) At the city gate—the long destroyed Porta Decumana—bishop and clergy joined the cortège, and conducted the Count to the cathedral, where he renewed at the altar his oath to respect the rights and liberties of his duchy of Aosta. The court of justice was held in a great hall on the cathedral square, and the Count presided, seated on a throne, with the Bishop of Aosta on his right hand, the Lord of Challant on his left. The Chancellor of Savoy and the council were ranged below the dais, and the nobles round the hall according to their rank. The Count remained in the city until every cause had been tried, every complaint heard. These septennial visitations were almost the only peaceful moments in Aostan history, for the barons were a specially turbulent set, always at feud with one another, or squabbling with the towns and villages regarding manorial rights and tolls. When the Count was in residence he frequently protected the lower classes against their

tyranny, and was the arbiter in their disputes. Their ruined strongholds still bristle on the hills on either side of the Dora ; and their watch-towers were so arranged that, in times of public danger, signal fires blazed almost simultaneously throughout the length of the valley, and called to arms the three companies charged with its defence. The lords of Challant were the leading house of Aosta, and once owned the greater part of its territory. Their name meets the eye at every turn, and Aosta cathedral contains several of their tombs and numerous records of their munificence. The family only became extinct in 1868.

One of the principal events of Aostan history is the expulsions of Calvin.* The reformer first came to the valley in 1535, on his return from Ferrara, not only bent on winning converts, but hoping to detach the duchy from its allegiance and induce it to join the Swiss Confederation. He had gained many

* Although the bells of Aosta still ring mid-day at 11 o'clock, in memory of Calvin's expulsion, recent researches disprove the legend of his visit to Aosta in 1535.

adherents when the authorities took alarm, and decided to expel him. A second decree ordering his arrest compelled him to fly at a moment's notice. A column surmounted by a cross, and dated MDXLI, still commemorates this event, where four streets crossed in Aosta. This ugly little monument has a fountain at its base, and its testimony to the public zeal for the old faith is somewhat marred by the inscription, "*Chapelle Evangelique*," staring it in the face from an opposite door.

Throughout the ages, this border valley has echoed with the tramp of armed men : of Gauls, Carthaginians, Romans, Goths, Burgundians, Franks, Lombards, and Ligurians, afterwards followed by crusaders, pilgrims, and native troops marching to attack or defence.

In 1600 Charles Emmanuel I. led 10,000 men over the Graian Alps against the army of Henry IV., then occupying Savoy. In 1630 Prince Thomas of Savoy hard pressed by the French, during his war with his sister Cristina, widow of Victor Emmanuel I., encamped on a high mountain plateau above Pré St.

Didier, where many of his men perished from cold and privation. In the same century the French seized the fortress of Bard below Aosta, but were dislodged by a bold stratagem. A handful of mountaineers scaled a crag behind the castle and fired a volley into the banquetting hall. Believing themselves surprised by a superior force, the startled invaders quickly abandoned the stronghold. During the reign of Victor Amadeus II. another French army swept down by the Little St. Bernard, in 1691, devastated the whole valley, sacked Aosta, and retraced their steps laden with spoil and hostages. Thirteen years later the French again crossed the same pass, occupied the valley for two years, and only evacuated it after the battle of Turin. Then, for ten years more, the passage of miscellaneous soldiery, always depredatory, if not hostile, kept the inhabitants in continual alarm. The village of La Thuile cherishes traditions of those troublous times, and the peasants proudly relate how, in 1708, their forefathers defeated a powerful French force on its way to Aosta under General Mourey, in the Pierre Taillecé gorge, and how

the dismayed enemy turned tail and fled back to Savoy. And from Savoy, by the usual route, came speeding Charles Emmanuel III. in 1730. He must reach Turin without delay, for his ruthless father, King Victor, the hero of Browning's dramatic poem, was trying to repossess himself of his abdicated throne. And in 1742 he passed up the valley with a large army to drive the Spaniards from Savoy.

Such are a few of the war records of Val d'Aosta. At the gates of Italy it is still of the utmost strategic importance, and invading neighbours would find its passes well guarded. The fortress of Mont Bard, an ideal stronghold, grandly perched on an isolated rock, and now almost impregnable, is the key of the lower valley. We all know how it checked Napoleon's advance in 1800, and how, but for the treachery of its Austrian commandant, his artillery could not have slipped through the village below. The railway to Aosta, tunnelled through the castle rock, can be easily defended, while farther on the frowning bulk of Mont Jovet, round which the road is so cleverly

engineered, is honeycombed with mines. These fired, a chaos of rocks would barricade the valley against attack.

It is impossible to describe in detail the varied charms of the seven hours' drive from Donnaz to Aosta. Rugged peaks give grandeur to the valley, & soft luxuriance, and the dancing, sun-kissed waves of the Dora are always in sight, bounding, rushing, winding, between meadows and vineyards and osier beds. Orchards and chestnut woods cluster beneath daring crags, and at every turn the sky line is broken by fresh mountain ranges. Castles innumerable, not only crown the lesser hills, but rear their broken walls on apparently inaccessible heights. Several of these cyrics have been carefully restored, and finest of them all is stately, many-towered Issogne, near Veres—the Roman *Vitricium*. Erected by Georges de Challant in 1480, it is a typical manor-house of the period. The interior has been artistically restored, and although many of its original treasures are scattered, still contains many interesting relics,

as well as fifteenth-century decorations and sculptures.

The numerous villages on our road are as picturesque as they are dirty, half Italian, half Alpine in character, with their wooden balconies, shingle roofs, square towers, and dark yawning archways festooned with trailing carnations. In honour of St. John, all the streets are lined with greenery. Tall branches and saplings propped against house-walls hide their squalor, and make a verdant back-ground for holiday groups. The traditional costume of the valley—the well-known red swallow-tail and cap of organ-grinders' monkeys—is little worn now, but bright neckerchiefs, and an occasional red cap, give a dash of colour to the crowd. Near the mineral springs of St. Vincent the road skirts magnificent chestnut groves, and cascades leap the cliffs to the river below. Across the valley the stern walls of Ussel and its watch-towers are seen guarding the mouths of dark ravines leading to still wilder regions.

Soon we reach Chatillon, a picturesque town of

some size, next in importance to Aosta. It is boldly terraced up the hillside, and cleft in two by a deep gorge, through which the Marmoreo torrent fights its way to the Dora from the ice-fields of the Matterhorn. Church and castle tower above the cascade of roofs, and, of course, the castle once belonged to the Challants. It is said to be well preserved, and to contain fine rooms, and many old family portraits, but we were too hot and dusty to climb the steep ascent, and content with the view up the valley towards distant peaks and glaciers. Chatillon is full of Roman remains: sepulchral stones, inscriptions, etc. Its principal church occupies the site of an ancient temple, and there is a fine Roman bridge, now unused and preserved from decay by a modern substitute, built a few feet above it. Twelve more miles by the river bank bring us at last to Aosta, which is finely situated in a broad basin of meadow and garden land fronting the jagged crests of the Becca di Nona and Mount Emilius. But at first sight it is a disappointing town, in spite of its position and wealth of anti-

quities. Passing through the famous Augustan arch, with a crucifix suspended from its Pagan vault, and the double gates of the Prætorian fort, we enter a narrow street lined with tall, dingy houses. Gutters border the cobble-stones, wretched, deformed *crétins* gibber on the door-steps, and the crowd of loungers comprises a terribly large proportion of fever-stricken faces and swollen necks. The street seems endless, for after opening into an arcaded square set round with commonplace public buildings, it winds on again narrower and duskier than before, and we are relieved to find that our hotel lies outside the town, and parted from it by the tree-bordered green known as Le Plot. And here we may note that French is the language of the valley; all the shop signs and inscriptions are in that tongue, and the poorer inhabitants scarcely know a word of Italian. Of its many old-time masters the Burgundian has left the strongest stamp on Aosta, and most of the domestic architecture is unmistakably French.*

* "Historical and Architectural Studies." (Macmillan.)

The Mont Blanc Hotel proves to be a charming resting-place, clean and well-kept. Built, like most of the larger houses of the district, round three sides of a court, its western windows command fine views of the Cogne Mountains, across the luxuriant valley, and on either floor a deep, covered gallery gives airy access to the rooms.

Heat, dirt, and cobble-stones are sad checks upon antiquarian ardour. Why should all visitors to Aosta feel bound to trace the circuit of Terentius Varro's camp, and note every fragment of the old Roman walls? We should have had nothing fresh to say on the subject, and archaeological students can find all particulars in Mr. Freeman's study of Aosta, and the pages of * King, Murray, and Bædeker. We were content to peep at the remains of the amphitheatre in a convent garden, and then sought the cool shade of the cathedral. This is a plain old building, spoilt by a barbaric façade, Corinthian porch, and gaudily-coloured saints in relief, but is flanked by two fine towers, one

* King. "Italian Valleys of the Alps." (Murray.)

of which is a massive example of the early Romanesque. The interior, although vilely restored and loaded with tawdry decorations, is interesting, and has memorials of many different ages. There are the mural tombs of Challant's lords, of Thomas II. of Flanders, of bishops, etc. The choir is paved with curious thirteenth-century mosaics, and has finely-carved stalls. There is a massive ancient font and a Romanesque crypt, supposed to be part of the original basilica erected by Constantine the Great. We peered into its dusky depths through a grating at the head of the steps, and saw that it served as a lumber-room for altar properties. The choir dates from the twelfth century, central nave and transept from the fifteenth. The present time is chiefly represented by waxen ex-votos: little hollow figures, male and female, strung in bunches before a wonder-working shrine. There is a pretty little triangular cloister on the north side of the church, with an altar to Diana, and a quantity of Roman inscriptions huddled away in one corner. The treasury contains some fine silver reliquaries and illu-

minated books ; but its proudest possession is an ivory diptych of the fifth century, with a marvellous statuette of the Emperor Honorius in his early youth.

At the north-east corner of the town we found, in the precincts of St. Ursè, a fascinating old-world spot seldom explored by tourists. A dirty lane, bordered by a streamlet of rushing water, led us to a little grass-grown *place* with a huge lime-tree in the centre. There was a church on one side, and on the other a stout twelfth-century bell-tower shut out the Great St. Bernard from our view. We entered the Priory church through a beautiful cloister, and looked on a sunny garden plot, through double rows of Romanesque columns with scenes from the Old Testament rudely carved on the capitals. Mass was going on, the organ pealing, and a row of canons in faded purple capes, and with wrinkled, weather-beaten faces, filled the the carved stalls of the choir. Red damask hangings, a barocco altar with twisted gilt columns, the gay kerchiefs of kneeling women, and shafts of light streaming through painted windows, made a rich and glowing picture.

The ancient crypt below is interesting as the first place of Christian worship in Aosta. Its patron, St. Ursc, was, it seems, a Scotch saint, and his memory is held in high veneration. The Priory is an imposing building in the style of the French Renaissance, its mullioned windows framed by delicate mouldings of fruit and flowers in red *terra cotta*. Internally there is little to be seen, for the great chapter room is debased to kitchen uses, and its carved wainscoting stacked piecemeal against the wall of an upper room. But in the round tower we found a little chapel with feeble, faded frescoes of some historic interest. An Annunciation, with the angel to the right of the spectator, is a departure from the conventional treatment of the theme.

The Leper's Tower, immortalised by Xavier de Maistre, is picturesquely placed among gardens to the south of the town. Our readers will remember the touching tale of poor Guasco's fate towards the close of the last century, and that his case was the last known instance, in Europe, of the real, virulent leprosy once

so familiar a disease. Not far from this tower stands another, where, so runs the legend, an unlucky lady of the Challant house was starved to death by a jealous husband. Her dying cries won for this tower of hunger the title of Bramafam. But nothing within the walls of blazing Aosta was half so pleasant as an evening ramble by shady lanes to the edge of the Dora. The speed of the racing, tumbling flood gave life and joy to the landscape, and lovely details of rock and vineyard, green woodland, and golden corn were framed in by jagged mountain walls, and crowned by the snowy crests at the head of the valley.

We were bound for Courmayeur, an Alpine resort at the foot of Mont Blanc, four thousand feet above the sea, and the drive from Aosta repeats on a grander scale the scenery of the lower half of the valley. We follow the river between rocks and ravines, vine-covered slopes, ruined castles, picturesque brown-roofed villages, and groves of chestnut and walnut. The country seats of the Aostan nobility, stern mediæval strongholds, set about with flowers and ornamental shrubs, and the

royal hunting lodge of La Sarre, throw a note of modern luxury amid the wild surroundings. Soon the valley draws in to a savage gorge, and the snow-peaks cluster thickly ahead. To the left, through the opening of another valley, we have a passing sight of the Grivola's sharp white cone, buttressed by purple crags. At the next turn yawns a dark gully delving into the heart of the Cogne Mountains, and at its mouth, on an isolated peak, stands the castle of Montmayeur.

This was the nest of a turbulent brood, whose device was "*Unguibus et rostro*," and the following legend tells how the head of the house lived up to his motto, somewhere about the middle of the fifteenth century. Count Montmayeur generally dwelt in Savoy, where he owned large estates. Part of these lands were claimed by a kinsman, and after much fierce dispute the matter was laid before the Senate of Chambéry. When notice of the suit reached Montmayeur at his castle of Clairvaux, a few miles from the city, he instantly rode down to the Senate House with a bag full of title-deeds at his

saddle-bow : and, whether by logic or threats, pleaded his cause so well that the president of the Tribunal, one Sicur de Fésigny, staked his life on the Count's success. The verdict, nevertheless, was given against him, and Montmayeur, with a mighty oath, swore to be revenged. But time went on, and there was no sign of either beak or claws being called into play.

Then one morning Fésigny was surprised by a visit from the defeated Count, and still more surprised by his courteous and smiling demeanour. Montmayeur was weary, it seemed, of family strife, and, having already made peace with his victorious kinsman, had bidden him, with other friends and relations, to a grand banquet. Might he not hope to be also favoured with the President's company ?

De Fésigny hummed and ha'd, but finally accepted the invitation, and on the appointed day rode up to the gates of Clairvaux. He had passed no one on the road, the castle looked grim and deserted, there were no signs of festivity to be seen, and for a moment he felt strongly inclined to turn tail and gallop back down

the steep descent. But the chieftain, all smiles and affability, stood waiting to welcome him under the archway with thanks for his kind punctuality. The other guests had not yet appeared ; the host became fidgety, astonished, annoyed, and presently ordered the repast to be served without them. The President's suspicions were quite allayed by this time. The dishes were exquisite, the wines of the choicest growths. He drank deep, so did the Count ; their tongues loosened, jest followed jest, and the host was most excellent company. Their merriment was at its height, when suddenly Montmayeur's manner changed and he said, in a solemn tone :

"Sieur de Fésigny, are you a good Christian?"

"What do you mean?" asked the astonished guest.

The inquiry was repeated with increased emphasis.

The President laughed, and raising his glass answered lightly,

"You are very kind, dear Count, but why this concern for the state of my soul?"

"Turn round and you will see," thundered Montmayeur.

De Fésigny turned and sprang to his feet. The arras behind him had been drawn aside. He saw a funeral bier at the end of the hall, and a dozen monks ranged round it began chanting a litany for the dead. A masked figure, dressed in red, stood, axe in hand, beside a block.

De Fésigny's eyes opened, his glass dropped, and the blood-red wine ran along the uneven floor, staining the stones by the block.

"Through you I lost lands and gold," cried the Count. "Your head is forfeit. Quickly make peace with Heaven, for you have to die."

The scared President tried to laugh.

"This is a sorry jest, my lord Count," he stammered with trembling lips.

"'Tis no jest. Make thy peace with God."

Then the betrayed man fell upon his knees, appealing to the laws of hospitality, asking mercy for wife and child's sake. But in vain! At a sign from their

chief two of the feigned monks dragged the victim to the block, and in an instant the executioner's task was done.

Early the next morning the Count mounted his horse, and—again with a leathern bag at his saddle-bow—rode down to the Senate.

"Here is a fresh document connected with my case," he said, laying his bag on the table; and, hastily saluting the assembly, at once quitted the hall and rode away. The Senators sat waiting for their President, grumbling somewhat at his delay, when presently red drops were seen oozing from the leathern bag. It was opened, and the head of De l'ésigny found within.

After this act of violence the Count found it expedient to leave Savoy, and, flying across the mountains, long defied justice in his impregnable castle of Montmayeur.

Once through the defile of Pierre Tailleé, the natural gate against which more than one invader has battered in vain, the valley again opens out, and the dome of Mont Blanc is seen glittering above a façade of black

pointed crags. And here the trim vineyards, still terraced by the road, begin to be tiresome. Vines imply heat, and in this wild region, 3,000 feet above the sea, with fine cascades fresh from the glacier world seaming the cliffs on the shady side of the Dora, they are clearly out of place. We are glad to leave them behind, to say good-bye to the chestnuts, to greet the firs and beeches, and to feel the first gusts of real Alpine wind.

Passing the village of La Salle, birthplace of Pope Innocent V., and its thirteenth-century castle, and Chabodv across the river, famed for its curious ice cave, we clatter over the stones of Morgex, the chief town of Val Digne, and soon come to Pré St. Didier. This bathing-place is a charming sleepy hollow at the foot of Mont Cramont, just where the zigzagged road to the Little St. Bernard parts from the highway to Courmayeur. It is a place of rushing waters, of verdant slopes overhung by fierce crags and pine forests; its hotels and lodging-houses are grouped round three sides of a little square, and visitors must

lead a sort of happy family existence in its queer, cramped, balconied dwellings. Its mineral springs are said to be very efficacious against rheumatism, paralysis, and scrofulous ailments. The bath-house is charmingly situated behind the village in an avenue of overarching walnuts, and from the rock-strewn slopes above there is one of the finest views of Mont Blanc. From no point has the mighty mass a more imposing effect, and its glistening snows are seen above a vandyked wall of pine tops and through a framework of boughs. Many after visits only strengthened the fascination of Pré St. Didier. The old bath-house, beyond the établissement, lies in the cleft between Mont Nona and the Cramont, where the torrent of La Thuile bursts through in a series of magnificent leaps and rapids. Following a little track above the edge of the water you come to the source of the hot spring, a bubbling well in a dripping cave. Edelweiss grows in this enchanting gorge, probably brought there with fallen sods from the Cramont overhead, and it is strange to see this snow-flower flourishing in

company with maidenhair, polypody, and a profusion of mountain pinks and campanulas.

Storm-clouds gathered about us during the ascent to Courmayeur. Crossing the Dora for the last time, our way wound about a great shoulder of naked rock. No trees followed us ; they had wisely remained in the sheltered basin below. The chain of Mont Blanc was blotted out ; endless fields of potatoes, beans, and half-ripe rye made an uninviting foreground. It was all so bare and bleak ! Why, oh why had we not fixed rooms at St. Didier ? At last our driver cracked his whip ; we were entering a narrow village street lined by half-demolished hovels, heaps of stones, and incipient masonry. And this was Courmayeur !

CHAPTER IX.

COURMAYEUR.

CERTAINLY our first impression was dismal enough. But we would not yield to it, and were full of hope as to this much-praised resort. It was only the rain we said. What mountain place is not dreary under a steady downpour? So we cheerfully rattled past two promising hotels through the main street of low-browed shops and taverns, by a picturesque church perched above a wide, tree-set terrace overhanging the valley, and on to the outlying hamlet of Larzay where we had ordered our rooms.

But one night's experience of the damp, dirty, ill-kept house was enough. The next day saw us established in the Hôtel Royal of Courmayeur, content to pay royal terms for cleanliness and comfort in the

worst rooms of that famous hostelry. All the good apartments were pre-engaged for the season at prices considerably higher than those of Zermatt, or other luxurious Swiss resorts ; and this we found, to be the rule throughout Piedmont. There is no great travelling middle-class public to create competition, and so these mountain hotels cater for wealthy and noble patrons, who can afford to be lavish, and who, provided the table be good, are ready to put up with very cramped and inferior accommodation.

Bertolini's "Royal Hotel," though badly placed in the village street, is a spacious house of the Aostan style, with wide covered galleries on every floor, and big *succursales* across the road and behind. Our northern windows under the roof faced the glaciers and peaks of the "Giant's Tooth," with dusky Mont Fréty at the foot of the ice.

The dome of Mont Blanc is hidden from Courmayeur by the Chétif, an obtrusive, ill-conditioned, sugar-loaf of a mountain, bare topped, and with a few starved firs on its stony side. To the right the bold

cliffs of La Saie mask the glaciers and peaks of Les Jorasses, but serve as an effective background to the fine church tower. This tower plays a gay part in the village life, for its bells sound tinkling *carillons* at frequent intervals on all high days and holidays, to a jig-like measure, more provocative of dancing than devotion.

The inhabitants are a well grown, hard-working, courteous race, the men often handsome, the women robust and well favoured while young, but terribly hideous in old age. Their stiff little white straw hats, decked with gay ribbons, feathers, and tinsel, give them the air of an opera chorus in the hay-fields. The French element shows in their high cheek-bones, neat attire, and trimly shod feet, while also, as in France, the children wear close caps and *bouurrelets*, and are never seen bare footed. The villagers' speech is a soft, drawling *patois*, they sometimes understand Italian, but always return your greetings in excellent French. They seem to be healthy and well-fed, there are few cases of goitre, and a refreshing scarcity of

idiots. There is one poor deformed innocent, but she comes from Aosta. With a withered, death's-head face, and stunted, twisted limbs, this unhappy creature wanders about decked in tags and rags of faded finery. Her craze is to believe herself a beautiful young lady, betrothed to an officer, who is shortly coming to marry her. The village folk call her the "Countess," and follow her with mocking cries, for she courts attention, and has a word for everyone. Now and then she turns on her tormentors, and, hurling ugly words at them, gets cruelly pelted with mud and stones. It is a sorry sight, and even respectable inhabitants seem shamefully ready to join in the sport. Once we found the poor cripple, after one of these conflicts, washing her mudstained face at the fountain, and carefully adjusting her battered bonnet with the aid of a pocket-mirror. It was touching to see her misery turn to joy at the gift of a few pence.

Arriving before the season began, we saw Courmayeur gradually open its eyes. Long-closed shutters

displayed miscellaneous shops and bazaars, tables and chairs sprouted on the uneven flags by the *café* door, white curtains fluttered from the rival hotel, and groups of ladies and children occupied the casino courtyard. The baker stacked sheaves of alpenstocks beside his loaves and *grissini* ; a smiling French milliner arrived from San Remo with hats and adornments ; the post-master—a dolcful personage with a black bandage round his head—renewed and enlarged his stock of stamps ; and the slapping of linen and clatter of women's tongues went on all day at the washing-tank opposite the hotel ; and several times a day big brand-new diligences and travelling carriages brought fresh loads of people and boxes.

But daily our wonder increases as to how all these visitors pass their time. Those who take the waters are well employed toiling by shadeless paths to the iron springs of La Victoire, across the valley, to the hydropathic establishment down by the river, or to the sulphur baths of La Saxe beyond Larzay. But how do the rest dispose of the long, blazing days ?

There is positively no shade at Courmayeur, and its noble scenery has to be enjoyed from dusty roads and glaring cornfields, whence trees have been banished for the sake of the crops. The valley runs from south to north, and Courmayeur, on a ledge of its eastern slopes facing the gap of the Chécruit pass to the west, is flooded by sunshine all day. There are no woodland retreats within easy reach for quiet outdoor life, no avenues for invalid loungers, even no hotel gardens! The nearest Alpine forest is three miles away, the other side of Mont Chétif. There are, it is true, the woods of Mont Carmet above the village, but—in the absence of balloons—they are only attainable to good mountaineers, and even the pleasant larch grove behind the church must be won by the sweat of the brow. Here and there you descry a fringe of trees at the turn of some meadow path, but, making joyfully for the shady spot, find that you must either dangle over a precipice or sit in a water-course. Every where, indeed, there is a pleasant babble of water through the grass, the fields being irrigated by count-

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less rivulets, provided with big stones and baby sluices to turn the streams this way or that.

There are quantities of common field flowers, few that are distinctly Alpine, although the small asphodel grows here and there, the rosy sempervivum stars the rocks, and Turk's-cap lilies stand sentry over the corn. Most abundant of all are the wild roses. Now, at the end of June, sweet-briar and eglantine are in full beauty. White, pink, and red, they perfume the air, wreath hedge and bush with graceful trails, and rise in rich sprays and trophics. Prettiest, perhaps, of all is the cream-coloured, scentless, small-leaved variety.

Down by the Dora are enchanting spots, where firs and silver birches come to the edge of the stream, and you look beyond flashing rapids to the great still glaciers above. Too often the pleasure is bought by toilsome descent under the fierce rays of the sun ; but on cooler days, when the leaves of birch and poplar are not only quivering but windblown as the draperies of Botticellian maidens, it is a delight to dip into the gorge and mount the slopes across the torrent. In all

directions there are splendid views. Through the southern jaws of the valley and framed by green mountain walls the Grivola or Corne de Cogne can be seen, its clear-cut white cone and ice caves fenced by grand indigo-blue crags, with patches of snow in their hollows. After sunset you may see it transformed to a pyramid of roses, its jagged bulwarks no longer blue, but darkest red. Across the valley the buildings of Courmayeur straggle along the hillside below the larches of Mont Carmet and the green bluff of La Saxc. To the north the Brenva, Géant, and Jorassiére glaciers close in the view, their army of peaks and pinnacles breaking the sky-line, while above all the huge "Giant's Tooth" is touched with a golden light. All about us are lush-green slopes, a few groups of larch and fir, scattered rocks, and patches of corn. The rapids of the Dora sparkle at the turns of the gorge below, and behind us, in a wooded glen by the Chécruit torrent, are the wells of La Victoire. The spring issues from a rock in a cave, and there is a modest little pump-room and covered promenade

for the patients' use. The sparkling water, containing some magnesia and a little iron, mixes pleasantly with the red Aostan wine drunk at Courmayeur, but seems too weak to be efficient as a cure. From this point good walkers can vary their homeward route by following the torrent to its junction with the Dora, and, crossing a foot-bridge to another mineral spring, climb the old road to Courmayeur. Or by mounting the steep track through the glen they may gain a spur of the Cramont, high above the valley.

With all its defects—heat, dust, fashionable crowds, and the noise and mess of hasty building, to meet the increasing demand for accommodation—Courmayeur is an admirable centre for excursions, and has a good staff of guides. By the aid of mules you can escape to cooler regions, and once past the saw-mills and sulphur springs of La Saxe, across the Pont de Chèvres, and round the stony base of Mont Chetif, you soon reach the forest of St. Nicholas, lining the gorge on the way to the Aleé Blanc. Here at last you are in a real mountain world. Through the trees

you see the grand ice-fall of the Brenva descending in giant steps to the waste of stones and moraine below. You have turned off from the main valley, the handle of the hammer-shaped trench once filled with ice, and, looking back, you command the whole of the other branch, the wild *cul de sac* of Val Ferret hedged by the Grandes Jorasses and Mont Dolent, where furious torrents dash through a waste of rock and moorland down to the main stream. In the centre, at the foot of Mont Frety, the hamlet of Entreves stretches its corn and potato fields to the roots of the Géant. Just before the forest closes over our track we come to a little chapel on a plateau above our heads. This is Notre Dame de Guerison, a wonder-working shrine, resorted to in all emergencies by the country-folk. It once occupied a lower site, but in 1818 the Brenva glacier swelled across the gorge and crushed its foundations. Now the ice is much shrunken, and you look down a steep limestone precipice to the milky torrent cleaving the embankment of moraine, and see the besmirched, stone-strewn ice-cliffs in which

the Brenva suddenly ends. Higher up, the glacier is of incomparable magnificence. Its dazzling white mass is broken by dark rocks and chasms of delicate blue and green, and it is flanked by the wildest crags. You see the white summits of the Monts Maudits behind, and far above all, against the sky, the curve of the translucent *Corridor* leading to the dome. There was once an enormous ice cave at the foot of the glacier, but it has long since fallen in.

Mounting past a fountain to the church we find it lined with votive offerings : little waxen figures, ribbons, flowers, silver hearts, and hideous daubs representing visions of the Madonna and the miracles she has wrought. A sheaf of crutches stands in a corner in pious memory of the lame and halt who have gone away healed. At the time of our visit the church was empty, but we had met several women and children returning from it, and pilgrims frequently come to pass the night there in prayer. Besides the sick and maimed, dowerless girls repair to the shrine to implore the boon of a husband. The other day

some friends, sketching on the steps outside, were startled by cries of pain. Peeping into the church they saw a woman kneeling before the altar, holding a lighted taper to a sore on her child's leg !

In the forest there was Alpine vegetation at last. The mossy glades were studded with forget-me-nots, hoary grey campanulæ, and white *pirolæ* flowering among the rocks. The Brenva ice-fields and its guardian peaks were seen through a curtain of fir-branches. On and down, right to the edge of the torrent, our way led past a ruined smelting-house, and across the bridge to a cluster of châlets in a sunny glade. Piles of newly-felled trunks filled the air with a delicious scent ; a crystal streamlet went rushing by. We bivouacked under a clump of pines, made a bonfire of chips, and feasted on bowls of cream. Behind us a dense wedge of forest filled the triangle formed by the huge moraine and the base of Mont Pêteret. Now and again we heard the faint crash of an avalanche, but the ice atoms were settling to rest, and the stillness of evening was soon upon us. It was

time to mount our mules and turn our backs on the lovely scene.

And now all the peaks were tipped with gold, the snow wreaths of the Dôme cold and pure against the delicate sky. Again and again we paused to watch the white glory above the pines. How can one define the exaltation produced by mighty mountains? Is it mere admiration of form and colour and magnitude, of daring outlines of rocks and ice, or is it that the sight of these marvels brings us nearer to the unseen? There is restfulness, too, in the exaltation, an unloosing—as it were—of the bonds of the flesh. Human life, passion, pain, suddenly dwindle to insignificance. Striving gives way to content. We accept the fact of our nothingness in presence of these forces of nature. What pigmy human effort, for instance, can compare with the march of a glacier, its relentless destructive power, its progress written on the rocks?

Another day we followed the same road, up the Val Veni, past the Pteret and other stern outworks of Mont Blanc, and, skirting miles of the Miage

moraine, reached the Lac de Combal, in the centre of the Allée Blanche. It is a weirdly solemn scene. The lonely lake is guarded by strange white peaks and glaciers, and the Dora pours from it through a passage in a great dam of moraine. Its waters are milky-blue, with faint peacock tints in the shallows. The shores are a garden of dwarf Alpine flowerets—pansies, violets, pale anemones, gentians, forget-me-nots. To the right lies a deep, dark gorge, partly blocked by the great wall of moraine winding from the Miage and hiding it from our view. Picketing our mules in a hollow where a little spring bubbled through the grass, and emptying our lunch-basket with the appetite of mountaineers, we spent delicious hours scrambling up the course of the cascade, and exploring flowery dells lined with rhododendron and creeping pine.

But these excursions to the foot of famed peaks and passes are tantalising things, and we envied the travellers we met on the road who had come over from Chamounix by the Col de la Seigne. We had only a distant glimpse of the great Alpine drama, but they

—happy mortals!—had trodden its stage. Nevertheless, the glimpse had enlarged our store of mountain memories ; and the lurid storm effects, replacing the brilliant clearness of the day, gave new interest to our homeward ride.

But Courmayeur was daily more crowded and antipathetic. Dinner became an endless function, and the flash of diamonds and rustling of Parisian skirts were poor substitutes for the sunset glories we were compelled to forego. Royalty was soon to come, there was a whirl of preparation, landlord and staff were half wild with excitement, and cartloads of furniture arrived for Queen Margherita's rooms. These were in the new part of the house, commanding the valley ; and an adjoining wing, that we had seen rise from the ground, was hastily roofed in, and the courtyard cleared of timber and stones. It was time for quiet folks to go elsewhere ; but before packing our trunks we accomplished our long-promised trip to the Little St. Bernard.

Fortune gave us a fine brisk day for the drive, and

though storm-clouds still hovered over the peaks they threatened no harm. Pré St. Didier, bowered in walnuts and poplars, its slopes in full sunshine looked prettier than ever, as we wound up the zigzags in the shade of the gnarled pines clinging to the flank of the Cramont. A tunnel cut through the rock and roofed with stalactities, brought us to the gorge of La Thuile, high above the torrent hidden in its depths. But soon, as we rattled down hill, sparkling rapids were visible belows the firs of Mont Nona. Here and there were busy saw-mills, and enticing footpaths at the edge of the water. With the river on one side, the Cramont forest on the other, with cascades leaping the rocks high over head, flashing through the trees and threatening the road at various points, we drove on to the village of La Balme, picturesquely placed in the widening valley. But again the gorge narrows, and our way lies across it, among the firs of the opposite slope, and well out of reach of the avalanches that so often fall from the Cramont. Closer and closer the mountain walls draw together ;

the torrent between them is buried beneath masses of last year's snow, blackened by dust and shale. This is the spot where Hannibal so nearly perished, the strait gate through which his host forced its way into Italy. The wonder is how they got through at all, those struggling masses of men and horses, and elephants! Apart from all fabulous additions, that relentless march from Spain to Thrasymene is perhaps the greatest exploit of the world's history.

Again the mountains fall apart, and in a wide basin of corn-land and pasture lies the *bourgade* of La Thuile. It is a treble village, and each cluster of *châlets* is grouped round a church. One of these has a northern spire of glistening tiles, another a square Italian bell-tower. Still following our torrent, we see that it issues from a wooded vale at the base of the Rutor—Rutor! Is not the sonorous word enough to show to the reader's imagination the mighty ice-fields we beheld leaning against the sky, and guarded by ink-black crags? This grand glacier holds a lake in its curves, is approached through splendid

forests, and feeds the cascades of Derby in the Val d'Aosta.

Crossing another stream, we turn aside up a wild, bleak ravine, and, mounting through fir-woods, presently come to sunny slopes, thick-set with flowers and shrubs. Mont Blanc rears its flank between two veiled summits ; the air grows keen, trees disappear, and we descry a gaunt red house of refuge on a crest above the road. All along our route we have noticed a stir of military preparation for the sham fight of the following day at the head of the pass. Men of the Alpine regiments are stationed in every hamlet, lancers trotting past with flying pennons. We are near the summit now, and cross a wide, shallow vale, folded about by snow-peaks and ice, and with one or two lakelets in its hollows. Hard by is the circle of Druid stones, where the Celtic god Pen was worshipped, and which is commonly called the Circle of Hannibal. The Cipollino column by the road side, topped with an iron cross, and now the boundary-stone of Piedmont, is the famous Colonne de Joux (Jupiter's Column),

once adorned legend tells us with an enormous carbuncle of wonder-working powers, called Jupiter's Eye. The country-folk still search for the magic stone, but, so far, without success. This undulating waste, set round by grim mountain forms, has a strangely majestic charm. We saw it at its brightest, cheered by brilliant sunshine, while the stir of the camp, red cattle grazing on the vivid, spongy herbage sown in the hollows, and patches of cotton grass, with white waving turfs, gave life and colour to its desolation. Rows of little brown tents were ranged about the hillocks, horses picketed in rings, soldiers were cutting trenches, soldiers carrying tussocks of hay and straw, soldiers feeding the bivouac fires, setting pots to boil, cowering over the flames, resting, sleeping. Sentries stood shivering in the cruel wind, officers chatting and smoking on the steps of Refuge No. 2.

It was terribly cold, icy gusts blew from the hills of France, dark storm-clouds hung over the Grande Chartreuse. We were half frozen by the time we reached the Hospice. Two rusty half-breed St Ber-

hounds rushed, barking, down the steps of the gaunt building, and a smiling, weather-beaten ecclesiastic gave us a gentler welcome. Leading us to a comfortable room, he warmed us with a delicious cordial, and left us to rest until the next *table d'hôte* was prepared. Too tired and starving to take a walk in the interval, we gazed at the landscape through the tiny casements, examined the maps, and explored the building. Some of the wainscoted rooms were decently furnished, and if well scrubbed would be no bad quarters for a summer month, in spite of the all-pervading smell of stables. We found a bright little chapel, containing a sensational modern fresco depicting the rescue of a frozen traveller by St. Bernard monks, and adorned with numerous trophies of paper roses. But fresh Alpine flowers bloomed before the shrine of the Madonna.

The Hospice belongs, not to the Church, but to the Order of St. Maurice and Lazarus ; it gives gratuitous food and shelter to the poor, and is partly maintained by the offerings of other visitors. The Rettore, a

telegraph clerk, and four servants constitute the whole establishment, and for eight months of the year they are entirely isolated from the world. Notwithstanding his grimy, common exterior, the present Rector is a man of reading and culture. He has filled his post for twenty-seven years, and has strange tales to tell of storm-beaten travellers and winter alarms. Once an enormous drove of cattle bound for a fair in Savoy were caught by a *tourmente* near the summit, and the stables being too small to harbour more than a tithe of their number, many were trampled to death in struggling to gain the warm shelter; while others, rushing wildly over the pass, perished among the snow-drifts.

Our lunch was a lingering, roughly-served meal in the company of some forlorn Italian tourists, and we were glad to escape their prose for the poetry outside, and take a brisk walk into France. There were patches of snow in the hollows, and miniature glaciers wedged among the rocks. Every ravine blazed with serpentine lines of gold, where caltha-fringed torrents

coursed through beds of emerald bog-grass. Baby cascades leapt into baby pools, in fairy gardens of Alpine flowers and moss. There were masses of gentians, of starry parnassus, sweet-scented pansies of various shades, forget-me-nots, violets—yellow and blue—saxifrage, etc., etc. And all this dainty enamel was set in scrolls of the golden-globed ranunculus. The delicate beauty at our feet was in strange contrast with the stern nature around us. The Little St. Bernard is not specially renowned for its scenery, but its width of wild foreground lends added grandeur to the environing crests and ice fields. They seem a company of Titans taking their ease, sprawling and stretching huge limbs in every direction. Two rugged heights thrusting forward to the Cols, the Belvedere and Valessan, command fine views of the Rutor and Cogne mountains, but there was enough to be seen without climbing to higher points. Behind us were ranges of serried crests, dominated by the bulk of Mont Blanc ; before us the varied peaks of the Tarentaise and many glaciers ; above us brilliant sun and

fleeting clouds, on every side changing arabesques of light and shadow.

And on the long homeward drive Mont Blanc threw off his mantle, and, rearing his snow crown against the tender, rose-flushed sky of Italy, bade us a royal farewell.

CHAPTER X.

IMPRESSIONS OF NEW ROME.

NEW ROME is not the saddening sight one expected to see. In spite of hideous modern buildings, reckless destruction of beautiful things, and all the vulgarities of hasty civilisation, it is a grand city, the worthy city of young Italy. Progress may be crude, is often uncomfortable, generally ugly ; but it has certain undeniable advantages.

In the days of my youth midnight Rome was a place of darkness : occasional oil-lamps only intensified the gloom, or feebly revealed gruesome dust-heaps in the dim, empty streets. To return on foot from a tea-party to one's hotel inspired a sense of perilous adventure. One hurried over the nubby stones, clinging to the walls, casting timid glances this way

and that, as though expecting an ambush at every corner, or lurking daggers under every arch. It was almost a relief to hear the tramp of soldiers' feet, the "Qui va là?" of a French patrol in crossing some shadowy square. Now, electric light chases all mystery away; the streets are full of carriages and pedestrians, of blazing cafés and shop-fronts; fountains sparkle in the artificial moon-rays; all is bustle, and gaiety, and life.

Presently the Monte Citorio clock disturbs our sleep with its quarterly declaration of the hour. At first one endures this cheerfully enough, knowing that its pendulum swings over the Parliament of United Italy; but when you remember that there are no night sittings it becomes a nuisance. By day—well: better if it struck within the House to remind garrulous legislators of the flight of time!

Just now, in June, even with the Budget still under discussion, many deputies have flown. But despite scanty numbers, little more than a quorum, there is a vast amount of noise. What a pandemonium it must

be when all seats are filled ! For the benefit of readers unacquainted with Rome, I may say that the house is a lofty circular hall, with wide open galleries at the top for visitors and the Press. Its amphitheatre, split in sections by gangways, resembles a huge cake ready sliced, with all the plums—*i.e.*, the Ministers—at the bottom. The Ministerial Bench is backed by a tall stand supporting the voting urns, and this is parted by a narrow passage from the lofty platform where the President of the Chamber sits enthroned with the officials of the house on either side, and long tables heaped with documents and stationery.

Italian Members are better off than their English brethren as regards material appliances. They have comfortable seats, capacious desks, and are supplied *ad libitum* with wine, sugar, and water. Many write letters and articles during the debates ; and one very active politician, seldom seen without a stout portfolio crammed with "copy," is said to accomplish most of his literary work in the House, undisturbed by the clamour about him.

Ladies are accommodated in the galleries above the President's chair ; and no grating impedes their view of the Assembly, though, of course, they can see only the shoulders and back hair of the advisers of the Crown. One does not hear well ; but it is the same in the men's galleries, owing to some defect in the building. Imbriani's voice seems the only one able to fill the House ; but whenever he turns towards the centre, his resonant tones are noisily echoed from above.

At the signal for a division, a pair of voting urns for each Bill discussed is placed on the stand behind the Ministerial Bench. Black balls in the "white" urn are Noes ; white in the "black" urn Ayes. As the Members file past, dropping in their votes, they are careful to show only closed fingers to the House ; but from the ladies' gallery it can generally be detected whether whites or blacks have it.

Among the novelties of Rome is the Museum of Ancient Art, just arranged, in the Baths of Diocletian. Here are the marvellous frescoes disinterred from the ancient villa discovered beneath the Farnesina palace

They represent sacrifices, festivals, and varied scenes of domestic life with architectural or landscape backgrounds. The groups are so daintily drawn, all the accessories so skilfully planned, that the unnatural length of the graceful little figures never offends the eye. Yet every one must be at least eight heads high. The colouring is exquisite, the scenery charming ; we see the world in which gods walked with men !

Upstairs, beyond the wing devoted to the Blind Asylum, are treasures of still greater value : statues raised from the bed of the Tiber, and stained with the tint of its flood. One headless male figure, bending apparently in mortal struggle, is a triumph of sculpture ; and the warm, brownish colour, gives it the effect of being real flesh and blood suddenly turned to stone, rather than an artistic presentment of the human form. Other marvels, too, are there ; but the collection is opened by now to the public, and has been described by experts. The great cloistered court that once rang with the strokes of Michael Angelo's chisel is now filled with fragments of classic work. The cypresses

he loved so well rear their gnarled trunks and ragged boughs above a garden of marble : huge bulls' heads, broken shafts, exquisite traceries and bas-reliefs. Flowers too are there, vines, grass, and pomegranates. There is a picturesque huddle of terraced roofs and trees beyond, a brilliant summer sky overhead, a cry of swallows in the air ; and as one turns away through the mighty Roman arch one feels that here, at least, the old world and the new have joined in perfect harmony.

Another fresh delight is the " Papa Giulio " Museum on the Via Flaminia, beyond the Borghese woods. It occupies part of the once sumptuous palace erected by Pope Julius III. as a summer abode, in the midst of lovely gardens and vineyards. Here the pleasure-loving Pontiff held his court, feasted princes and potentates, and showered marks of favour on Michael Angelo. Throughout his five years' reign, he thought of nothing but his villa, lavishing untold sums upon it, and neglecting the gravest affairs of Church and State to superintend the details of its decoration. Vignola

had designed it ; Ammanati and other famous sculptors enriched it with their works ; Zuccari and a band of fellow-painters covered its walls with frescoes. Its domestic furniture was daintily carved and inlaid ; the richest brocades and gilt leathers were employed for its upholstery ; and everywhere masterpieces of classic statuary met the eye. Ammanati has left us a minute description of all this luxury, and some of the villa's scattered treasures are to be found enshrined in public collections.

How great would be the horror of the jovial Renaissance Pope, so ardently devoted to the joys of life, could he now return to his favourite retreat and behold it stripped of its splendours, with smoking workshops at its gates, and its chambers lined with memorials of the dead !

For here are gathered the results of excavations at Falleri and other Etruscan sites : stores of sepulchral vases and adornments, tombs of every period of that ancient race. There are even two specimens of the rare mode of sepulture that must have been, surely

reserved for heroes,—*i.e.*, huge tree-trunks split apart and hollowed out sufficiently to admit the honoured dead. In one of these the skeleton remains intact : a colossal form, who may have played a great part in his day.

The collection is well arranged in chronological order, a central case in each room displaying the finest specimens of pottery, bronze, gold work, etc., belonging to the period.

In a grass-grown court beneath, enterprising archaeologists have set up the fac-simile of an ancient temple. The measurement of its site at Alatri, a sacrificial altar, and a few fragments of its façade were their only guides to the task ; and the whole is a marvel of reconstructive ability and patience, yet it is not altogether satisfactory, has a crude, irritatingly modern air, and stirs the imagination far less than the broken sherds and stones from the original building.

Apart from the Museum, Papa Giulio's villa is worth a visit, were it only for the fascinating sixteenth-century fountain and fish-pond in the entrance court.

This is a large sunken basin, encircled by marble balustrades, and approached by two graceful flights of steps, under which are carved niches by the water's edge. At the back is a recessed inner fountain, draped with fronds of maiden-hair fern, and guarded by charming female cariatidæ. Pope Julius is said to have enjoyed angling in this cool retreat; and perhaps, when tired with the exertion of landing fish, he may have called for his mule, and mounted to his banqueting hall above, by the sloping ascent contrived in a tower, probably as much to spare him the fatigue of stairs as to facilitate the carriage of supplies in times when "lifts" were unknown.

The Cesar Borgia apartments in the Vatican are one of the novel sights of Rome, after remaining shut up and almost unheeded for centuries. Unfortunately, the books contained in them were being removed during our stay, and so, special permit notwithstanding, the Pinturicchio frescoes could only be enjoyed by hearsay.

But there are other sights to be seen at the Vatican

—a few famous statues, for example. The Library, too, was open, with its precious books and illuminations; but, owing to its light scheme of decoration, this hall resembles nothing so much as a glorified "housekeeper's room," and it is a positive shock to find treasures of learning stowed away in gaily painted presses better suited to contain china, confections, cates, and conserves. The great explosion of the powder-magazine at the Vigna Pia did much damage to the Vatican, and all traces of it have not yet been cleared away. One is tempted to regret that the hideous splendours sent to the Pope, from all parts of the world, should have escaped so lightly. Pius IX. has lost a foot in his gaudy glass presentment; but the huge malachite vases, and other painful objects, are unhappily intact.

Even this last stronghold of Papal Rome cannot keep quite aloof from the world of to-day. Driving up the picturesque sunken way behind St. Peter's, one sees this huge monument of pontifical pride faced by the realism of roses and artichokes in the

homely garden sloping upwards from the opposite wall, and, on coming in sight of the traditional red and yellow guards at the gate, one also beholds a modern Italian sentry pacing a parapet close by. Stepping forth on the terrace of the Sculpture Gallery, still dazed by visions of the things of beauty within, one looks down on the vulgar ugliness of Prà di Castello, with its acres of yellow barracks, dusty streets, and forlornly flaunting cafés. Yonder seam on Monte Mario is where its olives are torn apart by a funicular tram; on every side, monstrous new erections have started up to block out the familiar landmarks of ancient Rome. Even in the beautiful garden behind the Vatican, where the Pope takes the air, a modern chalet, built for his use, raises its incongruous walls against a background of ilex groves and pines.

After the hurly-burly of the Corso with its turmoil of traffic and improvements, its endless crowd and innumerable milliners' shops, it is pleasant to turn into Via Margutta and find that haunt of art-students

almost unchanged. It is cleaner than of old ; the street corners are no longer grievous to eye and nose ; the antiquity dealers have smartened up their dens ; but well-known groups at every door still furnish studies of "models" at home. There are the traditional Roman matrons with their arms akimbo, with flashing eyes and mountainous busts, the sandalled, beribboned peasants, the pretty girls with embroidered Abruzzi aprons, and the impish little boys, who have filled so many miles of paper and canvas ! There is the well-known entrance, dusty and dingy as of yore, with scraps of broken sculpture flanking its stairs, leading to the terraced garden, with roses streaming everywhere over tangles of greenery in the midst of a rabbit warren of studios. Turning through a dim archway where girls are stitching tarnished gold lace on costumes, and up a flight of outer steps, we reach Costa's door.

Little need to chaunt the praise of Giovanni Costa to English ears ! His contributions to London Galleries have long taught us that new Italy can

achieve some work worthy to rank with that of her masters of old. No show-studio this, no striving after effect, no clap-trap accessories to catch the public taste. It is a workroom, a grave, harmonious interior with only the adornments and artistic litter required for daily use. But every easel holds a masterpiece, and other treasures are stacked carelessly against the walls. Its southern owner, with his strong Roman face, thought-lined, ironic and kindly, has a northern appreciation of nature, and delights in the poetry of lonely wastes. Rendered by his brush, a few bushes, spikes of yellow broom, a patch of broken ground and a shadowy mountain-top, express the mystery of the Campagna. We turn from one scene to another with ever-increasing admiration ; each seems more exquisite than the last, perfect in technique as in feeling. Richest of all, perhaps, in suggestive charm, is the view of Monte Circeo with a stretch of shining sea beyond a red-brown desolate foreground. But the artist does not confine himself to landscape alone. Here is a por-

trait of his daughter, a winsome little child clad in dull, soft, Oriental blue, a marvellous triumph of colour. Then an oblong closed frame on a tall easel is opened to our gaze, and we see the famous "Cariatide Ligure." It is a watercolour drawing representing a peasant girl of the Riviera descending steps between narrow, white walls, with a bronze pail poised on her head. The tint of the cloudless sky, seen through a fringe of olive boughs is repeated in the ribbon adorning the maiden's strong young throat. She faces the spectator with a carelessly radiant smile, unconscious of her lightly-borne burden, full of the joy of life, the incarnation of southern spring tide, and equally heedless of storms to come. It is a masterpiece of poetic realism and its high finish—for Costa is not of the impressionist school—in no way diminishes its vigour.

Most travellers are familiar with the sights of Tivoli, its cascades and temples, its glens and olive woods, but for some years past few have been allowed to penetrate the enchanted precincts of Villa d'Este,

to enjoy its wondrous outlook over mountain and plain or listen to the voice of its many waters in its bird haunted groves. So we eagerly accepted the invitation of its present owner Prince Cardinal H—— to visit his beautiful home. Discretion forbids details of private hospitality and kindness but we may say that from the moment of entering the gate by the cathedral where a row of peasants leant resting in the shade a glamour of sixteenth century Italy was about us the work a dry world banished forgotten! One modern association however joined in the charm for in these halls the Abbe Ister had lived and made music and it seemed as though in echo of his mighty chords might still be lingering among the frescoed forms overhead. The endless rooms and fascinating little oratory niched among them are all decorated by Zuccaro's brush and in their cool dim space we forgot the heat without so that it was a surprise to issue forth on terrace and loggia, and find the green world of I atrium still bathed in a glory of light.

The spell lasted even when rushing Romewards
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through the olives and across the Campagna in a smoky tramcar. Then, most piquant of contrasts, the evening was spent in a literary house, discussing modern problems with noted politicians and wits.

Another memorable day took us to Rocca di Papa. Again we steam across the flowery wastes of the Campagna, between regiments of scarlet poppies and yellow marigolds. Fields of corn, swept by the strong wind from the hills, are swaying, heaving, shimmering, a sea of greenish silver. The air is scented with new-mown hay, where workers are busy with scythe and rake—all is brightness and movement. Even grey towers, broken arches, and castellated farms have lost their solemnity this jocund, breezy day. The train halts among the olive-yards at Frascati, now modernised into a fashionable resort. We pass the trimmest of public parks, and are soon bowling past cypress-guarded Edens, and winding up a rustic road hedged with honeysuckle and eglantine. Then through ranks of chestnuts and clumps of oak, lit up here and there by streaks of golden broom, we

see new hills at every turn, new glimpses of the waving Campagna.

Now straight ahead rises the Alban Mount, with the convent of the last of the Stuarts, a white spot among the trees on its crest. We talk of the togged heroes that once climbed the stones of the Via Triumphalis, but only see a brown torrent of roofs tumbling headlong from the vulture's nest of Rocca di P'apa.

Soon we reach the foot of the town on the neck of a promontory commanding all Latium. The sea is a faint white line beyond the multicoloured plain. Distant mountains are veiled—even St. Peter's and the Lateran rise like pale ghosts above misty Rome, and a dull haze obscures the Sabine hills. We are on an irregular piazza, half-surrounded by ruinous old houses and unfinished new ones. The fountain in the middle splashes spasmodically as the wind drives its jets this way and that. A fringe of ragged stone pines skirts the wall of a graveyard at the edge of the cliff. We glance up the precipitous main street,

apparently closed by a second fountain, but then splitting into a tangle of more precipitous lanes ascending to the ruined Borgia fortress, now peacefully tenanted by watchers of the stars.

Beyond the town stretches a range of hills densely covered with chestnuts and beeches—fold after fold of soft greenery, plunging into the deeper depths. The corner house of the main street, fronting the piazza, has a tablet over its door to record the residence of Massimo d’Azeglio. That genial patriot and statesman had artistic as well as literary tastes, and passed one or two summers of his impecunious youth dreaming of great pictures, producing bad ones, and revelling in a somewhat Bohemian freedom. His “Ricordi” gives a delightful account of these vagabond experiences and of Roman country life and manners in the “twenties.” Such guitar-thrumming, such love-stories, such jinks, and, best of all, such a deliciously make-shift encampment among the rats and bats and family portraits of the Sforza Castle at Genzano!

Rocca di Papa was almost deserted at the time of our visit. Summer visitors had not yet poured in, the natives, in spite of the brisk south-wester, were taking their daily snooze. Only two high booted men were lounging half awake on the piazza, two peasants crumpled on pack-mules riding up the street, a few babies playing on door-steps and half-a dozen fowls pecking tit-bits in the gutter.

After rest and tea in a house fronting d Azeglio's garden—where our hostess, albeit a leader of Roman society, played the housewife to perfection, flitting to and fro over the bricks of her rustic quarters with daintily kilted skirts—we set off to the Madonna del Tufo, a miracle-working shrine at the edge of the woods, and gazed down on the cupolaed ridge of Castel Gandolfo, overhanging the lake of Albano. No need of description here: the names suffice to celebrate the oft-sung scene.

A short climb through the trees brought us to the rear of the castle rock, just beneath the level of its ruined gate, and here we were speedily surrounded

by a swarm of small boys pouring forth from caves and crannies to demand "soldi" in a "money-or-your-life" tone suited to the descendants of a brigand line. A little more climbing, and we stood on the brink of the ancient crater, popularly known as Hannibal's Camp, at the foot of Monte Cavo. Here legend, if not history, says that the Carthaginian rested his troops before swooping down into the plain. Girt about by mountains and cliffs, this green basin resembles a pasture in the heart of the Alps. The Sacred Mount beckoned to us in vain; both time and energy failed for its steep ascent; we were content to stand on a lower ridge and contemplate the pages of the world's history unrolled at our feet. Then we drove down through the chestnuts, with ever and again fresh glimpses of lake, sea, and mountains. It was hard to realize that this sylvan solitude was little more than two hours from Rome. Now and then a pack-mule clattered past, and, at a meeting of the ways, peasants resting on a bank with their guns seemed posed as brigands waiting for their prey.

Soon the scene changes we are skirting the walls of the C higi park, where giant trees and dense thickets might well bar approach to some sleeping princess and then past a rustic green that seems a bit of England with its palings, poplars, and grazing cows. But the next moment we are recalled to Italy by the sight of teams of cream white oxen, painted carts, sandalled peasants, and a huge stone archway overgrown with roses and ivy, and flanked by cypresses from which cataacts of banksia pour down in fragrant trails. The houses of L Ariccia close about us and lead to a broad Piazza overlooking the plain one glimpse of the glowing landscape is ours, one glance at the twin fountains frowned with masses of yellow nasturtium, and then, palaces and hovels left behind we enter that wonderful avenue of ancient trees known as the ' Galleria di Sopra, and look between bossy ilex trunks to the olive slopes and vineyards below. Houses again, stately palaces, terraced gardens, and here is Albano. It is quite a town. There are many people, many cafes, and half the shops are devoted to

yellow boots and shoes. Again the ilxes meet overhead, the scenery is more enchanting than before. Ah! there are the famous Barberini pines, there the lovely Torlonia grounds, the ideal of Italian landscape! One of its elements, however, defies analysis, for who can explain the magic of the Roman pine? Strictly speaking, it should be ugly: what is the charm of a tall, bare, grey trunk, topped by a ball of rough, dark-green spikes? Yet these trees are strangely fascinating especially when set in stiff rows, like pins. Why is this? Does the charm consist in their utter unlikeness to other trees, in the rugged energy and assertiveness of their mode of growth? Cedar, ilex, larch, beech, birch, almost any other tree, is more beautiful in itself than the umbrella pine, yet not one of them impresses the imagination with anything like the same force. That Barberini grove of weirdly slanting trunks stirs us to an almost reverential delight, as though suddenly beholding a company of gods! What is the secret of the pines? Not mere size and unwontedness. A drove of elephants in a

sheep fold would excite no such emotion. No : the charm is of subtler kind. Perhaps the mystery of ancient Rome still lurks in these trees !

Now we reach Castel Gandolfo, and, for once in our lives, sympathize with the Pope, seeing that his *role* of " Prisoner of the Vatican " compels him to renounce his summer palace. Loss of the temporal power, forsooth ! What is that compared with the loss of Castel Gandolfo !

High above the opposite rim of the lake—an emerald set deep in an emerald cup—soars the cone of Rocca di Papa, with its jumble of roofs flying down hill, as though pursued by tumbling rocks. We smile at it, as at the face of an old friend. Higher still, and now seen in its full majesty, rises the Sacred Mount we had so indolently refused to climb. Cardinal York's monastery, that white speck among the trees, on the site of Jove's temple, has just been converted into an hotel. If the shade of Jupiter Latialis still haunted the cloister while only silent monks passed to an fro, it will be finally exorcised by the cries of

knapsacked tourists. Nor will a phantom Juno care to linger there, watching "contending hosts" of porters and donkey-boys.

Another mile or so through shady ranks of ilex, more glimpses of the storied land glorified by writers of all nations, the fragrance of roses and vine-blossoms in the air, every olive tree gemmed with myriads of tiny white stars, pictures at every step—now of staidly pacing seminarists, or stately oxen,—next a string of wine-carts with drivers nodding on the hooded seats inherited from Etruscan waggons, and wide-a-wake, barking, bristly dogs scampering alongside. Then across open ground, past wooded gorges and rocky ravines, we clatter over the stones of Marino, where the life of many centuries seems strangely mixed. We see a bustling modern town of shoemakers, barbers, and cafés, a decayed city of princely mansions and terraced gardens, ill-used omnibus horses drinking from a grand marble tank, a painter's paradise of shadowy lanes, steep steps, and grimy archways, beautiful slatternly women, bright-eyed ragged chil-

dren, card-playing, wine-bibbing men, and wonderful effects of light and shade. We see an ideal landscape from a Piazza misadorned by an abominable group of brand-new marble figures, and down the next dark street come to an exquisite fountain fed by tawny Tritons and sea-gods. Close by soars the huge pinky-brown mass of the Colonna palace, with the emblematic column at its stupendous gate. We pass ruined walls, convent gardens, waste ground, glance up the steep causeway, once the main entrance to the town, skirt a modern public garden with geometrical flower-beds terraced on the flank of a precipice, and, through a suburb of mean new houses, descend to the station by the quarries in the gorge beneath.

The railway route to Rome runs past many well-known ruins and broken arches, with glimpses of the tombs on the Appian way, through fields of flowers and the rich brown earth of the *pozzolana* diggings. There is a nursery garden at the edge of Rome, where all the sheds and outbuildings are encrusted with scraps of ancient sculpture found on the spot. The

display of these graven stones seems ironical in the shadow of the hideous rows of tenement houses piled up just beyond by the station. We drove down to Monte Citorio through the crowded evening streets, our heads full of beautiful scenes and a most bewildering variety of impressions.

But the dominating impression of our brief stay is that Rome is a revived city. A spring of energy is welling through its veins. Its aspect on the Festival of the Statuto was enough to show that neither political complications nor financial anxieties had crushed the general gladness of life. There is plenty of toil nevertheless as well as play and the example of work is set by King, Ministers and Commons. Even on this national holiday the House met as usual, and the Sovereign certainly took no rest. This is how King Umberto spent the day. Arriving at 3 a.m. from Lombardy, he was on horseback by eight o'clock reviewing his troops. Then came his usual routine of State business. At two o'clock he was at the Hospital conferring the gold medal for military

valour on Captain Spaccamela, the hero of the powder magazine, who, at the terrible explosion a few weeks before, saved so many lives and nearly lost his own. An hour later he was presiding over the learned Assembly of the Lincci, and listening, apparently untired, to a very long astronomical discourse. Then in the evening, he gratified his people by attending the grand display of fireworks, known as the Girandola, on the Pincian hill.

All Rome was ablaze that night ; and the Corso, lined by pyramids of clustered lamps and filled from wall to wall by a slowly moving throng, had a curiously splendid effect. Everywhere joyous crowds, joyous music ; everywhere the radiance of electric light ! Yet we had to leave this fascinating city, and our only resource was to do as many departing travellers have done before, and, hurrying to the Trevi fountain, cast pence into its waters to ensure our speedy return.

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